Abstract for Case Report

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Title: Unmasking the Silent Killer: Rabies Mimicking Neurological Deficits in Sarawak

Introduction: Rabies remains a significant public health concern in regions like Sarawak, where cases often present with neurological deficits and a history of animal bites. Rabies and rabies-like illnesses are caused by a species of neurotropic viruses in the Rhabdoviridae family, genus Lyssavirus, which migrate centrally in a retrograde direction within the axoplasm of peripheral nerves until reaching the spinal cord and brain. Transmission primarily occurs through bites from rabid animals, with dogs accounting for the majority of cases in Sarawak.

Case Presentation: A 54-year-old Bidayuh woman with hypertension and dyslipidemia presented to the emergency department with generalized body weakness and fever, alongside a recent history of a dog bite in Sarawak. Neurological examination revealed bilateral lower limb paraplegia, initially raising suspicion for Guillain-Barré syndrome, with rabies also considered as a potential differential diagnosis. The patient was admitted to Sarawak General Hospital for further evaluation and management. Despite receiving the complete series of rabies vaccination and rabies immunoglobulin, her condition deteriorated, and she died in the ward. A final diagnosis of rabies encephalitis was made based on clinical findings, supported by radiological investigations.

Discussion: Clinical manifestations of rabies include an initial prodromal phase with nonspecific symptoms, followed by an acute neurologic phase characterized by either encephalitic or paralytic rabies. Diagnosis of rabies before death requires a high index of suspicion, especially in regions where the disease is endemic. Managing rabies involves immediate wound cleansing, post-exposure prophylaxis with the rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin, and intensive supportive care for symptomatic patients. Public health measures like vaccination of domestic animals, controlling stray populations, and educating the public are crucial in preventing rabies and reducing mortality in resource-limited settings.

Conclusion: This case serves as a reminder of the importance of vigilance for rabies in patients presenting with neurological deficits and a history of animal bites, especially in endemic regions like Sarawak. Early recognition and initiation of appropriate management are essential to mitigate the devastating consequences of this deadly infection.

Keywords: Rabies, neurological deficits, animal bites.

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