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Journal Title: Open Forum Infectious Diseases
Volume: Volume 4, Number 2
Publisher: Oxford University Press (OUP) | 2017-05-18, Pages ofx103-ofx103
Type of Work: Article | Final Publisher PDF
Publisher DOI: 10.1093/ofid/ofx103
Permanent URL: https://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/s41r6

Final published version: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ofid/ofx103

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Accessed May 28, 2018 4:46 AM EDT
Pericarditis Associated With Acute Zika Virus Infection in a Returning Traveler

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Despite the widespread outbreak, few cases of Zika virus associated with cardiac manifestations have been described. We present a case of pericarditis in the setting of an acute, symptomatic Zika virus infection in a traveler returning from St. Thomas. Clinicians should be alert for this potential complication of Zika virus infection.

Keywords. pericarditis; Zika virus.

Zika virus (ZIKV) is a member of the Flaviviridae family and is primarily transmitted to humans by Aedes mosquitoes [1]. The World Health Organization declared ZIKV as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in February 2016, and, currently, there are ZIKV outbreaks in the Americas as well as islands of the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. In the United States, most cases have occurred among travelers returning from locations in the Western Hemisphere. Symptomatic ZIKV infections in adults are typically described as a mild illness with some combination of fever, rash, conjunctivitis, arthralgia, myalgia, and/or headache. However, ZIKV infections have also been associated with severe complications typically affecting the nervous system [2–4]. In this study, we describe a case of acute ZIKV infection presenting with pericarditis.

CASE PRESENTATION

In October 2016, a 45-year-old woman presented to our clinic with 4 days of subjective fever, chest pain, rash, and joint pain after returning from St. Thomas in the United States. She had a temperature of 36.6°C. Her blood pressure was 155/95, heart rate 64 beats per minute (bpm), and respiratory rate 16 bpm. Her past medical history included mitral valve prolapse, irregular menses, and a congenital single kidney. Her family history was significant for cardiovascular disease. The patient had smoked cigarettes for over 20 years and smoked half a pack a day at the time of her visit. She walked approximately 1 mile a day but had not been able to exercise after her return. She was not on any prescription medications but took cranberry extract, glucosamine-chondroitin, fish oil, and a multivitamin daily.

On the day before her presentation in clinic, she had 2 additional episodes of transient chest pain, both occurred while sitting and improved with walking.

On St. Thomas, the patient stayed in a friend’s guest house, which had no air conditioning or running water. There were screens on the windows but visible holes around the sides of the screens. The patient reported having many mosquito bites despite using insect repellent. Her friend’s son had also recently been diagnosed with Zika. The patient was not sexually active during her trip.

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On physical exam, 4 days after symptom onset, the patient had a temperature of 36.6°C. Her blood pressure was 155/95, but other vital signs were within normal limits. Heart rate and rhythm were regular with normal heart sounds, no rubs, murmurs or gallops, and she had a non-displaced point of maximum impulse. Her jugular venous pressure was flat. The patient had 2+ distal pulses and nonpitting edema of her ankles. There was no evidence of synovitis, but skin exam revealed a diffuse, predominantly papular rash over her upper and lower extremities (Figure 1A), back, and chest. Results of routine laboratory tests were within normal limits (Table 1). Notably, the levels of creatine kinase-MB fraction (1 ng/mL; normal ≤6 ng/mL) and troponin I (<0.03 ng/mL; normal ≤0.04 ng/mL) were normal. Screening tests for human immunodeficiency virus and hepatitis B and C were negative. Reverse-transcription polymerase chain reactions (RT-PCRs) performed on serum were negative for dengue virus (DENV) and chikungunya virus.

Serum and urine collected at her initial visit were positive for ZIKV ribonucleic acid (RNA) using a real-time RT-PCR protocol based on assays developed by Lanciotti et al [5]. Results of serologic and cellular immunology testing for ZIKV are shown in Figure 1B–E. Serologic testing for anti-ZIKV immunoglobulin (Ig)M was negative on day 7 post-illness onset, but it was...
positive on day 9 and remained detectable through day 29, which was the last time point tested. Zika virus focus reduction neutralization test (FRNT) titers similarly increased from <30 on day 7 but was positive on days 9, 15, and 29. Horizontal red dashed line indicates IgM ratio positive cutoff of ≥3. Focus reduction neutralization test (FRNT) for Zika (in blue) was <30 on day 7 but became positive (≥titer of 30; cutoff shown with dashed blue horizontal line); Dengue-4 titer was <30 on days 7 and 9 but was positive on days 15 and 29. (C) Fluorescence-activated cell sorting phenotyping of fresh whole blood demonstrated very robust activation of CD8+ T cells (peaking day 15) and plasmablasts (detected peak at day 9) along with modest CD4+ T-cell activation. Cytokine-producing antiviral CD4+ or CD8+ T cells were detected against peptides from the Zika E, NS1, NS3, and NS5 proteins (Figure 1E).

Two weeks after symptom onset, the patient was seen in the Cardiology Clinic due to persistent chest pain. The pain worsened with inspiration, which caused her to take short,
shallow breaths, and it was worse when lying down, such that the patient had devised a way to cushion herself while sleeping so as to not recline. The pain did not worsen on exertion. She denied palpitations, orthopnea, and nausea. Her electrocardiogram showed normal sinus rhythm at rate of 76 beats per minute, no ST segment abnormalities, T wave abnormalities, or PR segment elevations or depressions. Transthoracic echocardiogram revealed a trivial pericardial effusion and 2 areas of hyperechogenicity in the right ventricular free wall and anterolateral septum with preserved wall motion. Although nonspecific, these could represent areas of myocardial inflammation. Based on her symptoms, a clinical diagnosis of pericarditis was made. The patient was initiated on colchicine 0.6 mg by mouth twice daily. Her chest pain resolved after 4 days on colchicine, further supporting the diagnosis of pericarditis, and her pain did not recur after completing a 28-day course of the medication.

DISCUSSION

In this report, we describe a case of pericarditis that occurred during an acute, symptomatic ZIKV infection. The immunologic milieu in our patient differs from that of adult patients in whom prior flavivirus infection and/or vaccination are common, and it also differs from the case report of myocarditis, in which the individual had evidence of a previous DENV infection [9]. Our case indicates that cardiac manifestations may occur in flavivirus-naive individuals as well as those with previous flavivirus exposure.

The diagnosis of pericarditis in this case was based largely on the characteristic clinical presentation and her response to treatment [10]. In terms of other common causes of pericarditis [11], the patient was in good health, had no risk factors for tuberculosis, did not have evidence of a connective tissue disease, and had no recent trauma. She was up to date on cancer screening, had normal thyroid and kidney function testing, and was not taking medications typically associated with pericarditis. Although causation cannot be proven, ZIKV is the most likely etiologic agent in this case due to the concurrent symptoms of pericarditis and acute Zika, along with detection of ZIKV RNA in serum and urine samples. Diagnostic confirmation requires testing of pericardial fluid and/or tissue, but because of her uncomplicated clinical course and lack of a significant pericardial effusion, there was no indication for pericardiocentesis. Magnetic resonance imaging could further characterize myopericarditis, but it was not performed due to her clinical improvement.

Pericarditis has been reported in the setting of other flavivirus infections, most commonly in acute dengue [12, 13]. Although the total number of cases is small, the majority of patients have presented between days 3 and 6 post-illness onset with ongoing symptoms of dengue fever [12–14]. Cases include both primary and secondary DENV infections [12], and when RT-PCR has been performed, DENV RNA is detectable at the time of presentation [12, 14]. The clinical history in our patient is consistent with reports of pericarditis in the DENV literature as well as the case of myocarditis associated with ZIKV [9]. Although we did observe a rise in DENV FRNT titers, this is consistent with known cross-reactions between anti-ZIKV antibodies and DENV serologic assays [1]. Dengue virus RNA was not detected in acute-phase serum, and her anti-ZIKV FRNT titers were >4-fold higher than the DENV titers, which is consistent with an acute ZIKV infection.

Treatment of acute viral pericarditis is supportive and consists of nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and colchicine. The addition of colchicine to conventional anti-inflammatory therapy reduces symptom persistence and risk of recurrence [15]. Our patient responded to colchicine without the addition of NSAIDs. Currently, there is no antiviral or vaccine for ZIKV, and prevention of infection is accomplished principally through avoidance of mosquito bites in endemic areas and barrier precautions during sexual intercourse after infection or exposure [16].

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Results of Routine Laboratory Testing</th>
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<td>Laboratory Test</td>
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<td>White blood cell count</td>
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<td>Troponin I</td>
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<td>Creatine kinase-MB fraction</td>
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CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we present a case of pericarditis in a ZIKV-infected patient. Clinicians should be aware of this presentation during the current outbreak, because it requires close follow-up and may improve quickly with medical management.

Acknowledgments

We thank the clinical staff at The Hope Clinic (Mary Bower, Sara Jo Johnson, Allison Beck, Dean Kleinhenz, and Jo Ann Sadowski) and the laboratory staff at The Hope Clinic Laboratory (Pamela Lankford-Turner, Sree Aramgam, Dongli Wang, and Vinit Karmali).

Disclaimer. The patient described in this case report provided written informed consent to participate in a natural history study of Zika virus infection (DMID 16-0017). The immunologic testing presented herein was performed as part of this ongoing study.

Financial support. This case report details a research study participant in a Zika virus natural history study funded by a National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases/Division of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (DMID) Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit (VTEU) award to Emory University (Contract No. HHSN272201300015I). Additional support was provided by the VTEU award (Contract No. HHSN27220130015I). Additional support was provided by the Georgia Research Alliance.

Potential conflicts of interest. All authors: No reported conflicts of interest. All authors have submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest. Conflicts that the editors consider relevant to the content of the manuscript have been disclosed.

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