Cerebellitis as an atypical manifestation of scrub typhus

A 21-year-old-man presented in a semicomatosed state with 2 days' inability to walk and 5 days' history of fever (102.2°F) and rash. Examination revealed severe ataxia, slurred speech, and a scrotal scar (figure 1). Head CT and CSF studies were normal. Brain MRI revealed diffuse cerebellar cortical hyperintensity on T2 and fluid-attenuated inversion recovery images (figure 2, A and B), with restriction (figure 2C) and postcontrast enhancement (figure 2D) suggesting inflammation. Weil-Felix test (OX-K-1:320)1 and immunoglobulin M ELISA were positive for scrub typhus. Improvement occurred after oral doxycycline.

Isolated cerebellar involvement is rare in scrub typhus,2 a mite-born infection caused by Orentia tsutsugamushi1,2 that classically presents with fever, rash, and eschar. Laboratory confirmation is required to differentiate it from co–endemic diseases like typhoid, lepthespirosis, and dengue.1

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Study funding: No targeted funding reported.

Disclosure: The authors report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

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MRI shows diffuse cerebellar cortical hyperintensity on T2 (A) and fluid-attenuated inversion recovery images (B); the involved areas show restriction (C) and enhance after contrast administration (D).

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Rohit Bhoil, Suresh Kumar, R.G. Sood, et al.
Neurology 2016;86;2113-2114
DOI 10.1212/WNL.0000000000002717

This information is current as of May 30, 2016

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