A Case of Recurrent Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy

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Abstract  
Takotsubo cardiomyopathy is an uncommon etiology of cardiac chest pain. Classically it occurs in post-menopausal women undergoing emotional stress. Clinical characteristics include cardiac enzyme elevation, electrocardiogram changes, apical wall motion abnormalities, left ventricular dysfunction and normal coronary artery angiogram. The abnormal wall motion recovers in a few months. Typical treatment is medical management until resolution of symptoms with angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors and beta blockers. Recurrence is documented, but is an extremely rare finding. Here we report a case of a woman who had a recurrence of takotsubo cardiomyopathy nine months after her first encounter, both due to an emotional stressor.

Case Presentation  
This case involves a 65 year-old Caucasian never-smoker female with a medical history significant for Type 2 diabetes mellitus and hyperlipidemia who presented to her primary care provider with palpitations and shortness of breath of several days duration. The palpitations were described as intermittent and worse with exertion. She denied any chest pain during these episodes. Incidentally, a few days prior to symptom onset, she reports feeling intense distress discovering her injured husband on the floor surrounded by a mild amount of blood after he fell in their kitchen. Family history was notable for diabetes and coronary heart disease in her grandparents diagnosed in their seventh decade. An ECG was done which showed diffuse T wave inversions and a troponin was found to be 1.6 ng/m (reference range: 0.000-0.040 ng/m). She was thought to have a non-ST elevation myocardial infarction and was emergently referred to the hospital. On arrival, she was hemodynamically stable. Serial
Recurrence occurs primarily in women and more commonly after TCM episodes associated with severe left ventricular dysfunction (7). Singh et al demonstrated that patients with recurrence commonly have a significantly lower LVEF during the first episode of TCM, compared to their counterparts that did not experience recurrence (7). Interestingly, several case studies have shown that the a physical or emotional stressor precipitating recurrence can be different between episodes (3, 7) as we observed in our case.

The most effective treatment for TCM is currently unknown due to the lack of case-control trials. Therefore, TCM is often treated supportively. TCM patients are most commonly discharged on antiplatelet medications, angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors or angiotensin receptor blockers (ARB), and beta adrenergic antagonists (7). It has been demonstrated that TCM subjects treated with an ACE inhibitor experience lower mortality rates than those who did not receive therapy (8).

However, there is little data to suggest whether treatment with these agents protects against recurrence. In fact, there have been several case studies of recurrent TCM in subjects who were previously treated with or were taking an ACE inhibitors, aspirin, and beta-blockers at the time of their recurrence (3, 4). The meta-analysis performed by Singh et al, however, found a negative correlation between the use of an ACE inhibitor/ARB and rate of TCM recurrence (4, 7). There was no significant association between the rate of recurrence and use of beta-blocker medication. Brunetti et al re-assessed the Singh data accounting for population weighted meta-analysis regression and found similar results (8). ACE inhibitors/ARBs are thought to reduce recurrence by either reducing sympathetic activity, through interaction with the renin–angiotensin system, or through anti-inflammatory effects on myocardium (7). The efficacy of ACE inhibitors/ARBs shows some potential, but more data will need to be collected to determine if they do indeed prevent recurrence. Specific agents, dosing, and duration will also need to be clarified as our case demonstrates a treatment duration of less than 4 weeks with an ACE inhibitor was not successful in preventing recurrence.

Conclusion

Our patient had two separate episodes of significant LV dysfunction and clinical findings consistent with TCM. This patient was interesting in that her clinical presentations were variable. In the first episode, her presenting symptom was dyspnea, while in her second episode chest pain was her presenting and only symptom. Her case is also unique because her first episode was treated with an ACE inhibitor/ARB to resolution, yet she still experienced a recurrence. This finding indicates that treatment of an initial TCM episode with an ACE inhibitor/ARB does not preclude recurrence and raises the question as to whether TCM subjects should be kept on ACE inhibitor/ARB treatment permanently, rather than to resolution.

Discussion

Recurrence of TCM is a rare phenomenon making the incidence difficult to determine (1-3, 5-7). Individual reports of incidence have been highly variable with ranges from 1.5-10% (1-3, 5, 7). Systematic reviews estimate recurrence rates of 1.5-3.5%. Of note, they also found that the cumulative incidence of recurrence increased from 1.2% at the first six months, to nearly 5% at 6 years (7).
of the initial episode, to prevent recurrence. (Fig 1.)

Fig 1. Serial Transthoracic Echocardiogram images demonstrating Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy onset (A,C) and resolution (B,D). All images obtained in four-chamber view during end systole.

References


