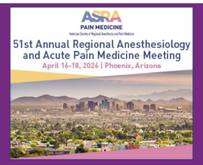

A Severe Headache as a Prodrome of Guillain-Barré Syndrome

Trinity Health

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Introduction

- Sudden severe headache ("worst headache of life") typically raises concern for subarachnoid hemorrhage, particularly when neurologic deficits are present.
- In this case, the headache represented an early prodromal manifestation of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), an uncommon presentation.
- GBS is an immune-mediated disorder causing demyelinating or axonal injury of peripheral nerves.
- It classically presents with acute ascending weakness, with or without sensory or autonomic dysfunction.

Case Presentation

- 65-year-old woman with T2DM, hypothyroidism, and recent respiratory illness (6 weeks prior) presented with sudden severe diffuse pressure-like headache.
- Further symptoms and physical exam: bilateral dysmetria (R>L), bilateral hand tremors, slurred speech, right facial droop, gait instability, and diminished lower extremity reflexes.
- While there was initial concern for subarachnoid hemorrhage, GBS was soon diagnosed following lumbar puncture.
- Treatment: 5-day course of IVIG, with immediate improvement in symptoms within 2 days.

Discussion

- Severe headache is rarely associated with Guillain-Barré syndrome, reported in ~2% of cases, and is even rarer as the primary presenting symptom.
- Proposed mechanisms include posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome or increased intracranial pressure.
- Management remains consistent with standard GBS treatment, including IVIG with or without plasmapheresis.
- In this case, IVIG treatment led to resolution of the patient's symptoms.

Case Timeline