

Bilateral Retinal Detachment- a rare complication of pre-eclampsia

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Introduction

Retinal detachment is a serious complication that requires prompt diagnosis and treatment to avoid permanently affecting the sight. It is a rare complication of pre-eclampsia (PET), <1%. Therefore more likely to be missed and thus increasing the likelihood of permanent visual impairment or loss.

Clinical (non-surgical) management results in complete recovery in majority of cases. The earlier the diagnosis, the better the prognosis. A high index of suspicion is therefore required with unusual or severe eye symptoms in pre-eclampsia. The importance and implications of this is, in a young woman, especially in her first pregnancy cannot be overemphasised

Case report

19-year-old primigravida presented at 33 weeks gestation with a 1 day history of a mild but persistent headache and worsening severe blurred vision. This was worse in the left eye and her most troubling symptom.

Initial assessment revealed an elevated blood pressure with proteinuria. Further assessment on the multidisciplinary (MDT) ward round on the delivery suite revealed the extent of visual symptom was significant and unusual. There was also generalised oedema and very brisk tendon reflexes though she didn't feel nor look very unwell.

Antihypertensive treatment was commenced immediately, as well as antenatal steroids, magnesium sulphate, bloods tests and discussions had with her about plans for imminent birth.

With her blood pressure stabilised, her visual symptoms were regarded as so unusually severe, the MDT decision was made to obtain an urgent, formal ophthalmology assessment, in the emergency eye clinic. She was accompanied for this and it was performed within the next 30 minutes.

Findings

Visual fields- RE- nasal step; LE – nasal step + temporal vision loss (matches retinal detachment picture)

OCT- RE- retinal detachment including macula; LE- large retinal detachment including macula

Management

Immediate birth via caesarean section, PET management and subsequent ophthalmology follow-up 2 weeks later

Outcome

Significant improvement of her visual symptoms immediately and progressively after the birth.

There is some persistent visual impairment and remains under ophthalmology surveillance.

Discussion

Her visual symptoms could have been regarded as just part of her PET symptoms and nothing more. The unusual severity was acknowledged by listening to the patient. Further delay would have resulted in worse detachment and more severe and lasting visual morbidity

Conclusion

The positive effect of good communication, listening to the patient and prompt, multidisciplinary care was powerfully demonstrated here.

Any unusual visual symptoms in PET should be investigated as it be due to retinal detachment. For this, time is sight- to prevent permanent visual impairment.

