

Communication, teamwork and other ‘soft skills’: essential tools in a modern-day workplace



Barts Health
NHS Trust

Garance BIOSSE-DUPLAN¹, Zoë TAYLOR¹, Nana SACKKEY¹, Elizabeth BALL² Mehreen MIRZA¹

¹Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Newham University Hospital, Barts Health NHS Trust; ²Royal London Hospital, Barts Health NHS Trust

1. OBJECTIVE:

- We present the case of a 16-year-old who's complex medical and social background had the potential to disadvantage her care
- Whilst clinically her case was relatively straightforward, cases like hers remind us that clinicians require strong ‘soft skills’ including **leadership**, **communication** and **teamwork** to ensure the delivery of good and equitable patient care

2. CASE REPORT:

Presentation:

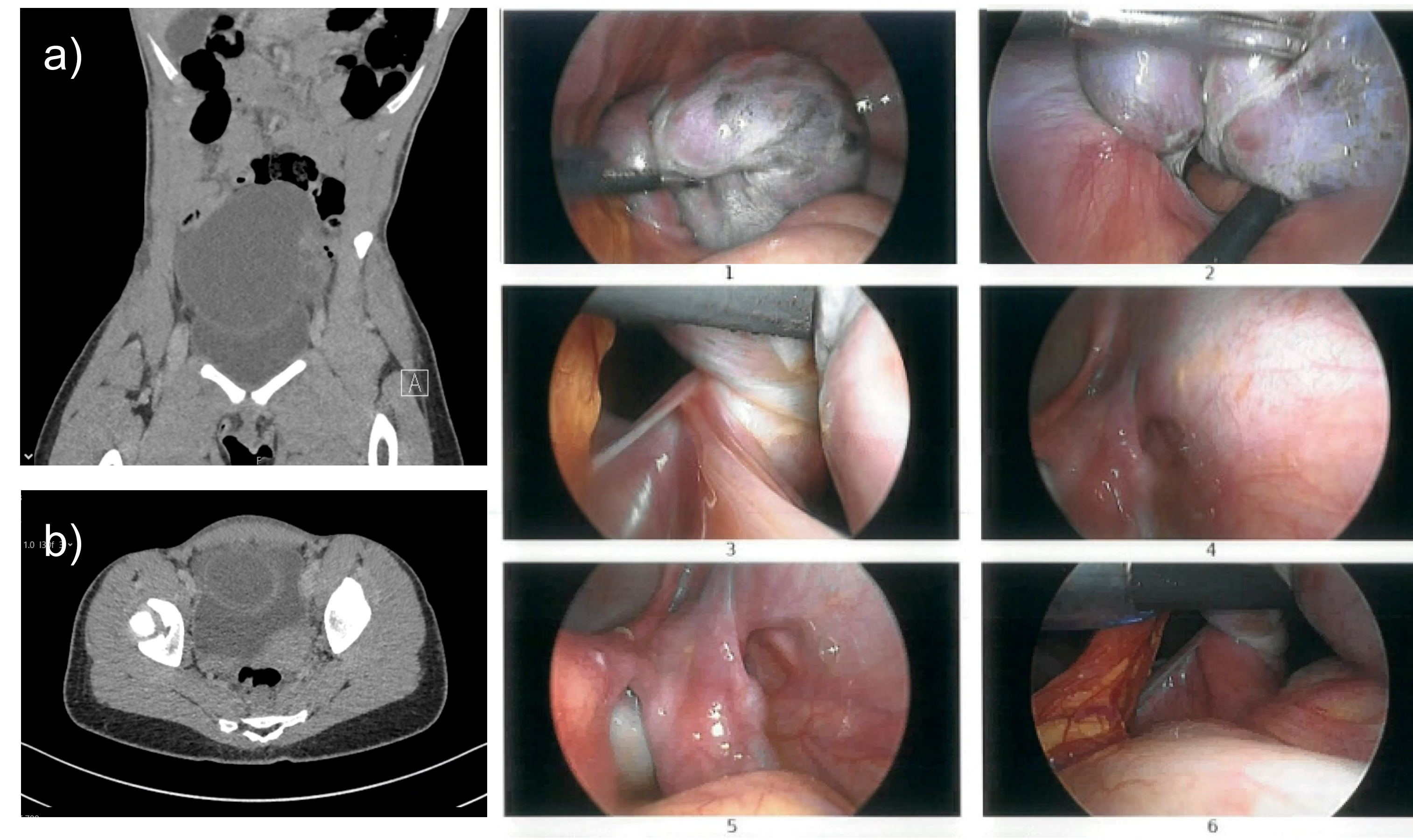
- 16-year-old Portuguese-speaking girl presenting with vomiting and abdominal pain
- Background of cerebral palsy and spastic quadriplegia, low body mass index, and learning difficulty
- CT (figure 1) showed a simple 10cm left ovarian cyst

Progress:

- Overnight, she deteriorated with signs of sepsis
- She promptly underwent laparoscopic detorsion and cystectomy (figure 2), with preservation of the ovary

Outcome:

- Discharged the next day with no further complications



4. CONCLUSIONS:

- Rapid clinical decision-making within and between multidisciplinary teams is both possible and necessary to turn around patient outcomes in the face of barriers imposed by an increasingly bureaucratic NHS
- Effective ‘soft-skills’ alongside clinical acumen are an essential requirement in providing the right care at the right time to a hugely medically and socially diverse population

3. DISCUSSION:

- Soft skills are important in the face of increasing policy and administration in NHS based workplaces
- In this case, leadership from the on-call consultant was required to pull together and coordinate an appropriate team, including a visiting surgeon, who was able to perform the operation on a paediatric patient, along with presence of a paediatric-trained anaesthetist
- Teamwork is a well-known requirement in surgery and is all the more important in cases where unfamiliar teams are asked to work together last-minute
- Effective communication skills are key in obtaining informed consent, especially when language barriers exist and when the patient's capacity to consent is unclear, highlighted in our case of a young patient with a learning disability
- Using formal interpreting services, diagrams, and appropriately engaging a child in their healthcare are all tools available to help streamline communication
- Collaborative multidisciplinary teamwork helps deliver equitable healthcare to patients for whom standard procedure is not suitable, and is becoming greater necessity in a modern day NHS

