"Mathematically very complex problem” and corticosteroids

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Abstract

Introduction: Over the years, exogenous corticosteroids have been used in the treatment of various medical illnesses and a number of adverse reactions have been established. About 6% of patients develop psychiatric disorders due to steroid therapy, although many more suffer from mild symptoms which do not fulfill a diagnosis. Evidence suggests that elevations in hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis activity have been implicated in the origins and exacerbation of mental disorders, as well as stress sensitivity and trauma, that can be related to chronic and disabling illnesses.

Objectives: To describe a case of substance-induced psychotic disorder in a patient diagnosed as having Hodgkin's lymphoma, resulting from corticosteroids administration.

Methods: We describe a 16-year-old girl admitted to our liaison unit while she was inpatient on paediatric oncology unit.

Results: After her second corticosteroid cycle she started being delusional with passivity experiences, showing psychomotor retardation and mannerisms, blunted affect, diminished spontaneous speech with higher latency, severe impairment of attention and concentration, time and space disorientation and flight of ideas. She was insightless and with poor judgment.

Discussion and Conclusions: Once starting Lorazepam 1mg + 1mg + 2mg; Olanzapine 5mg + 10mg; Haloperidol 5mg; Biperiden 4mg, she improved her condition, showing only psychomotor retardation. She improved whenever she was not in the interval period of the corticosteroids cycles, but her psychotic symptoms reappeared when approaching the end of the cycles. Currently she holds antipsychotic medication, with good response, and her main concern is returning to school, which is still postponed due to their organic condition. In management of physical illnesses with psychiatric features, we suggest that psychotic reaction should be taken into account as a possibility in all children and adolescents who develop behavioral changes during and after corticosteroid treatment. This study suggests that the biopsychosocial approach to health care and consultation-liaison psychiatry should be emphasized.