



MONOGENIC CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ISCHEMIC STROKE

Neurology

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ABSTRACT

Monogenic conditions account for a considerable proportion of patients with cryptogenic stroke. In some disorders stroke is the prevailing manifestation whereas in others it is part of a wider phenotypic spectrum. The identification of stroke cases caused by monogenic disorders is important both for therapeutic decisions and genetic counselling, although they represent less than 1% of all stroke patients. This article emphasizes on genetic, pathological, and clinical features of single-gene disorders related to ischemic stroke.

KEYWORDS

Monogenic, Stroke, CADASIL, Fabry, Marfan

INTRODUCTION -

Monogenic conditions account for a considerable proportion of patients with cryptogenic stroke [1]. In some disorders stroke is the prevailing manifestation whereas in others it is part of a wider phenotypic spectrum (Table 1). Most single gene disorders are associated with specific stroke subtypes, which together with the accompanying systemic manifestations may lead to diagnosis.

CADASIL

Cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL) is a small vessel disease due to mutations in NOTCH3 [2]. The clinical “phenotype encounters recurrent TIAs and strokes, progressive cognitive impairment and psychiatric disturbance with onset in early to mid-adulthood. About one third of patients develop migraine with aura [3-4]. Neuroimaging findings are similar to sporadic small vessel disease (SVD). A diagnostically important feature of CADASIL, however, is bilateral involvement of the anterior temporal white matter and external capsule [5-6].

NOTCH3 encodes a cell surface receptor, which has a role in arterial Fabry disease -

development and is expressed on vascular smooth muscle cells (VSMC). Mutations are greatly stereotyped in that most if not all mutations change the number of cysteine residues within one of the extracellular epidermal-growth-factor-like repeat domains [7-8].

Table 1: Single gene disorders associated with Ischemic Stroke

There have been single reports on mutations not involving cysteine residues [9] but the role of these sequence variants remains controversial. The mutational spectrum is broad. About 95% of the patients have missense mutations which cluster in the first few exons. Preliminary evidence suggests there are specific mutations are associated with a slightly more aggressive phenotype [10-11].

The mechanisms by which NOTCH3 mutations become pathogenic are still poorly understood. Most mutations do not seem to interfere with Notch3 receptor signaling [11]. However, studies in patients and transgenic animals have shown that the mutant Notch3 receptor accumulates in arteries and precapillaries [12-13]. Electron microscopy shows granular osmiophilic deposits within the vascular basal lamina, which are specific for CADASIL, present throughout the arterial system and can therefore be used for diagnostic purposes [14].

| Condition | Gene | Stroke Mechanism | Associated clinical features | Diagnostic test |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CADASIL | NOTCH3 | Small vessel disease | Migraine with aura | Mutational screening, Skin biopsy |
| Fabry Disease | Gal | Large artery disease and small vessel disease | Angiokeratoma ,neuropathic pain ,acroparaesthesia ,hypohydrosis,corneal opacities,cataract ,renal failure,cardiac failure | α -galactosidase activity, Mutational screening |
| Sickle cell disease | HBB | Large artery disease, Small vessel disease, Hemodynamic insufficiency | Pain Crisis, bacterial infection , vaso-occlusive crises, pulmonary and abdominal crises, anemia, myelopathy , seizure | Peripheral blood smear, Electrophoresis, Mutational analysis |
| Homocystinuria | CBS and others | Large artery disease,cardioembolism, Smallvessel disease,arterial Dissection | Mental Retardation, atraumatic dislocation of lense, skeletal abnormalities(Marfan-like),premature atherosclerosis, thrombo-embolic events | Urine analysis, Plasma Levels of homocysteine and methionine, (Mutational screening) |
| MELAS | Mitochondrial DNA | Complex(microvascular and neuromol factor) | Developmental delay, sensorineural hearing loss, short stature, seizures, episodic vomiting diabetes, migraine-like headache, cognitive decline | Muscle biopsy, Mutational analysis of mtDNA |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Marfan Syndrome | FBN1 | Cardioembolism and Arterial dissection | Pectus carination or excavatum, reduced upper-t lower- segment ratio or arm span height ratio, scoliosis>20%, ectopia lentis, dilation or dissection of the ascending aorta, lumbosacral dural ectasia | Clinical diagnosis , (Mutational screening) |
| Ehlers- Donlos Syndrome Type IV | COL3A1 | Arterial dissection | Easy bruising, thin skin with visible veins, typical facial features, rupture of arteries , uterus, ort intestines | Biochemical studies Mutational screening |
| Pseudoxanthoma elasticum | ABCC6 | Large artery disease and Small vessel disease | Skin changes (increased elasticity and yellow-orange popular lesions), Ocular changes (angioid streaks), Hypertension | Skin biopsy, Mutational screening |

Fabry disease (FD) is an X-linked systemic disorder due to deficiency of the lysosomal enzyme α -galactosidase A. α -gal A deficiency results in progressive accumulation of glycosphingolipids, (in particular globotriaosylceramide, GB3) in the myocardium, renal epithelium, skin, eye and vasculature. Symptoms often begin in childhood or adolescence with acroparesthesia, angiokeratoma, or hypohidrosis being frequent signs. Systemic complications involving the kidneys, heart and brain usually follow in mid adulthood.

FD is surprisingly common among young stroke patients. In a recent large series of young (18-55 years) patients with cryptogenic stroke 4.9% of the males and 2.4% of the females were found to carry a functionally relevant α -GAL mutation [1]. Cerebrovascular symptoms occur from both large artery disease (LAD) and SVD with a preference for the posterior circulation [15-16-17-1]. The SVD in FD is reflected by white matter changes and recent work suggests that the extent of such lesions is influenced by polymorphisms in the genes for interleukin-6, endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS), factor V, and protein Z [18]. These findings on potential modifier genes are promising but await confirmation.

FD may be suspected based on the associated systemic signs (Table 1) and confirmed by measuring α -gal A activity or by screening for mutations. In women, measurements of enzyme activity are less reliable because of skewed inactivation of the X-chromosome in female mutation carriers. The mutational spectrum is broad. Most patients carry missense or nonsense mutations in the coding region of the GAL gene. Enzyme replacement therapy with recombinant α -gal A is effective in reducing GB3 deposition and ameliorating some of the symptoms [19-20]. However, a benefit on stroke has not been demonstrated.

MELAS

The syndrome of mitochondrial myopathy, encephalopathy, lactic acidosis and stroke-like episodes (MELAS) is associated with several mutations in mitochondrial DNA [21-22]. About 80% of patients carry an A to G transition at position 3243 in the tRNA^{leucine(LUR)} gene. The second most common mutation (T3271C) is found in about 10% of cases. The relative distribution of mutant and wild type mtDNA may vary in different tissues explaining in part the immense phenotypic diversity of mitochondrial disorders. MELAS is associated with a variety of symptoms (Table 1). However, monosymptomatic cases with stroke as the sole manifestation do exist.

The cerebral lesions underlying strokes-like episodes in MELAS differ from typical ischemic infarcts. The cortex is almost invariably involved. In many cases, lesions are not limited to vascular territories and there are no embolic or stenotic lesions on angiography. Finally, MRI may show changes consistent with vasogenic rather than cytotoxic edema [23]. These observations point toward mechanisms other than pure ischemic infarction. Current hypotheses include i) a disturbance of the blood-brain barrier, ii) impaired autoregulation of cerebral blood flow [24], and iii) primary defects in neuronal oxidative metabolism. Lesions may spread over time or markedly regress on subsequent scans [25].

Connective tissue disorders

IS is a well-known complication of several heritable connective tissue disorders.

Marfan syndrome (MFS) is an autosomal dominant systemic condition

affecting the musculoskeletal system, cardiovascular system and eye [26]. The diagnosis is usually established on clinical grounds (27) and Table 1) whereas the role of genetic testing remains limited. MFS is caused by mutations in a very large gene(FBN-1; 65 exons) and more than 90% of families have a private mutation which renders mutational screening very laborious [28]. FBN1 encodes fibrillin 1 an extracellular matrix protein. Fibrillin 1 is expressed in many tissues including the heart and elastic arteries. It shares homology with the transforming growth factor β (TGF β) binding proteins and there is increasing evidence for a key role of TGF β signalling in MFS [28-26]. Cerebrovascular complications of MFS include transient ischemic attacks (TIA), ischemic infarcts, and subdural hematoma. In a retrospective series on 513 patients neurovascular manifestations were associated with cardiac sources of embolism, in particular prosthetic heart valves, mitral valve prolapse and atrial fibrillation whereas there was no association with aortic disease or cerebral artery dissection [30]. However, other studies have observed an association with aortic and cerebral artery dissection [31-32]. Further causes of IS include chronic anticoagulant therapy and perioperative embolic events in patients undergoing aortic root replacement [33].

Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) type IV, the vascular type, is an autosomal dominant condition resulting from mutations in COL3A1, the gene for collagen type III [34]. EDS may be suspected based on the associated clinical features (table 1) and confirmed by mutational screening or biochemical studies on cultured fibroblasts (synthesis of an abnormal type III procollagen).

The mutational spectrum is broad and neomutations are frequent [34]. About 50% of the index cases have no apparent family history. Cerebrovascular complications are common and include intracranial aneurysms, arterial dissection and spontaneous rupture of large and medium sized arteries [35-36]. In a series of 419 patients 10.5% had neurovascular complications [34]. Carotid artery dissection and fistulae involving the carotid artery were the most frequent findings.

IS has also been recognized as a complication of osteogenesis imperfecta and pseudoxanthoma elasticum [36] which is associated with stenotic lesions of the distal carotid artery and SVD [36-37] (Table 1).

Sickle cell disease

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is the most common cause of stroke in children [38]. SCD may be caused by the homozygous state for Hemoglobin S (HbS) or by the compound heterozygous state with other hemoglobinopathies such as HbC or β -thalassaemia [39]. HbS results from an amino acid substitution in the β -chain.

About 25% of patients with HbS/HbS and 10% of those with HbS/HbC will have a stroke by the age of 45 years [40]. The incidence of IS is highest between 2 and 5 years and lowest between 20 and 30 years. Conversely, the risk of hemorrhagic stroke is highest in the third decade [40]. Stroke recurrence is frequent. Clinically overt strokes are typically due to LAD. The latter is characterized by intimal thickening, proliferation of fibroblasts and smooth muscle cells and eventually thrombus formation. It is usually confined to the supraclinoid internal carotid artery and the proximal portions of the middle and anterior cerebral artery [41]. Ischemic infarcts are frequently located in borderzone regions in particular the anterior and deep borderzone region [42-38]. Apart from overt stroke many patients develop silent

infarcts [43-38]. These infarcts are small, located in subcortical regions, and attributed to SVD.

A critical component in the pathogenesis of both LAD and SVD is an abnormal interaction between sickled red blood cells and the vascular endothelium [44-38]. Sickled red blood cells tend to adhere to the endothelium thus favouring thrombus formation and vascular occlusion. Endothelial activation further promotes remodelling of the arterial wall and vasculopathy.

The risk of stroke in SCD seems to be strongly influenced by modifier genes [45-46-47]. In fact, the stroke phenotype in SCD has become a prominent example of modifying genetic influences in mendelian traits. An inhibitory effect of fetal haemoglobin (HbF) on the polymerization of HbS has been known for many years. Concentrations of HbF are under genetic control and have a major impact on SCD in general. A more specific effect on stroke has been demonstrated for polymorphisms in various genes involved in inflammation and cell adhesion. Thus for example, polymorphisms in the cell adhesion molecules VCAM and P-selectin were found to be associated with stroke risk in SCD [48-49-50]. Also, there is evidence for a role of the interleukin-4-receptor gene in determining stroke risk [49]. A major methodological step has been the use of Bayesian networks. By applying such networks to a large number of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), Sebastiani and colleagues [50] identified 31 SNPs in 12 genes that were found to interact with HbF in modulating stroke risk. The network included P-selectin and several genes in the TGF β pathway, which has been associated with stroke in other studies. Remarkably, this network accurately predicted the occurrence of stroke in an independent sample based on genotyping of just a few SNPs. These observations highlight the importance of modifier genes in monogenic conditions. They further emphasize a potential role of genetics in predicting stroke risk. The risk of stroke in SCD can be markedly reduced by transfusion therapy [51-38]. Yet, chronic transfusion may cause problems and identifying patients at risk of stroke remains a challenge. In this regard, screening methods based on genotyping are a potentially important approach [46].

Homocystinuria

Homocystinuria encompasses a group of mostly autosomal recessive enzyme deficiencies which cause high (>100 μ mol/L) plasma levels of homocysteine (Hcy) and homocystinuria. The disease should be considered in any child with stroke, mental retardation, atraumatic (mostly downward) dislocation of the ocular lenses or Marfan-like skeletal abnormalities. Homocystinuria must be distinguished from milder (15 to 100 μ mol/L) hyperhomocysteinemia which is a risk factor for stroke in the general population and associated with deficient dietary B6, B12 or folate and with a polymorphism in the methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR) gene. The most common cause of homocystinuria is a deficiency of cystathionine beta-synthase (CBS) a key enzyme in the degradation of Hcy [52]. More rarely, homocystinuria results from disturbances in the conversion of homocysteine to methionine by a pathway that requires the formation of methylated derivatives of folate and B12.

About 50 percent of untreated patients with CBS deficiency have a thromboembolic event by the age of 30 and about one third of these events involve the cerebrovascular system [52]. Homocystinuria may cause stroke not only through atherosclerosis and thromboembolism but also through SVD and arterial dissection [53-54]. Homocysteine has been shown to injure endothelial cells and increase smooth muscle cell proliferation in vitro [54]. Putative factors whereby homocysteine may induce vascular injury further include extracellular matrix modification, lipoprotein oxidation and effects on platelets and coagulation [55]. Patients with concurrent homocystinuria and factor V Leiden have an increased risk of thrombosis [56].

Approximately half of the patients with CBS deficiency respond to B6. Those who respond tend to have a later onset, a milder phenotype and a better prognosis [57]. The mutational spectrum of CBS deficiency is broad [58]. There are many private mutations but some mutations, in particular I278T and G307S, are relatively common [58-59]. An important observation regarding genotype-phenotype correlations has been that some mutations including A114V and I278T are associated with B6 responsiveness whereas others, in particular G307S are associated with B6 resistance. Early diagnosis of homocystinuria is essential, as complications can be minimised by early treatment.

MISCELLANEOUS

Ischemic stroke may occur as a complication of several heritable cardiomyopathies, dysrhythmias, hemoglobinopathies, coagulopathies, dyslipidemias, and vasculopathies. In some cases, an association with stroke has been firmly established. In many others an association is less well documented or a matter of controversy.

CONCLUSION –

In the majority of cases, a specific single-gene disorder is related to a specific stroke phenotype, although some disorders, such as FD, predispose to stroke by more than one mechanism. Vascular and parenchymal lesions seen with MRI and angiography could be a good support to the clinical diagnosis. In patients with CADASIL or FD,

the brain MRI can show specific lesion patterns, and in Moyamoya disease, angiography findings could be diagnostic. Another rapid and noninvasive investigation is skin biopsy, which permits the diagnosis to be addressed in a number of cases (CADASIL, hereditary endotheliopathy with retinopathy, nephropathy, and stroke, Fabry, PXE, and EDS). Therefore, the presence of specific clinical systemic features, in addition to young age at stroke onset, the lack of vascular risk factors, and a positive family stroke history could suggest a single-gene disorder. Thus specific diagnostic tools can aid the diagnosis, but genetic screening is nearly always necessary to confirm the diagnostic suspicion.

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