SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Atypical Presentation of Septic Arthritis

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study describes some atypical presentations of septic arthritis in elderly and immunocompromised patients.

Patients and Methods: Medical records of 32 patients who received a diagnosis of septic arthritis from January 2001 to June 2004 at the Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital were retrospectively reviewed. Patients’ ages, comorbidities, and pre-existing joint diseases were recorded, as well as the number and types of affected joints, and the organisms identified.

Results: Of the 6 patients (4 men and 2 women) with an atypical presentation of septic arthritis, 5 patients had septic arthritis of 1 knee joint and 1 patient had septic arthritis of both shoulders. Only 1 patient presented with a fever. The white blood cell count was marginally raised in 1 patient, and the erythrocyte sedimentation rate and C-reactive protein level were raised in the 5 patients who were tested. Synovial fluid cultures grew methicillin-sensitive Staphylococcus aureus in 2 samples, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus in 1 sample, and Streptococcus species in 1 sample.

Conclusion: Typical clinical features of septic arthritis (fever, chills, and rigor) may not always be present. Even if the clinical symptoms, signs, and other laboratory test results are inconclusive, the joint fluid culture results should always be obtained before septic arthritis is ruled out.

Key Words: Arthritis, infectious, Diagnosis, differential, Knee joint, Shoulder joint, Treatment outcome