

A Serious but often Forgotten Diagnosis of Arthritis in the Elderly

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Please cite this article as: Regaieg N. et al. et al. A Serious but often Forgotten Diagnosis of Arthritis in the Elderly. Middle East Journal of Age and Ageing. 15(3):73. DOI: 10.5742MEJAA.2018.93557

ABSTRACT

Introduction: First described in 1962, cholesterol emboli syndrome (CES) has been considered (since 1970) as a systemic disease similar to necrotizing vasculitis. It is an affection far from being rare but often neglected and under diagnosed: 15% of known patients having aortic atheroma but is clinically manifest in less than 2% of cases. His clinical picture is very polymorphic and non-specific making his diagnosis a real challenge.

Observation: A 64-year-old man with hypertension, coronary heart disease, dyslipidemia, and diabetes was hospitalized for acute functional impotence of the left lower limb.

The somatic examination noted arthritis of the left knee. The biological assessment revealed a hypochromic microcytic anemia at 10g/dl, leucocytes at 8 200/mm³, creatinine at 136µmol/l, ESR at 60mm/H1, CRP at 6 mg/l, glycemia at 15mmol/l without acetoneuria. The electrocardiogram, chest x-ray and ENT examination were without abnormalities.

X-rays of the knees showed advanced osteoarthritis. Articular puncture returned nonspecific inflammatory fluid with no microcrystals, direct examination, and culture were negative. An equilibration of his diabetes as well as a martial supplementation and a symptomatic treatment of his osteoarthritis attack was started but without improvement. His clinical was worsening with the installation of visual blur, right foot pain with purple coloring of the toes.

Biology showed a worsening of renal failure (creatinine at 266µmol/l). The resumption of the interrogation revealed the notion of a recent angioplasty. Ophthalmologic examination with fundus confirmed the diagnosis of CES.

The diagnosis of synovitis with cholesterol crystals falling within the framework of a CES was retained.

Conclusion: The notion of recent vascular manipulation must evoke the diagnosis of CES in an atheromatous subject with recent renal, cutaneous or ocular symptoms. The joint damage of this affection remains exceptional. Only an early diagnosis made it possible to improve the prognosis of the disease that remains reserved.