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Epilepsy & Behavior xxx (2005) xxx–xxx

Epilepsy
&
Behavior

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Case Report

Neurosarcoidosis presenting with simple partial seizures and solitary enhancing mass: case reports and review of the literature

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Received 3 January 2005; revised 25 February 2005; accepted 26 February 2005

Abstract

A 37-year old woman, who had presented 5 years earlier with suspected simple partial seizures, returned with seizures increasing in frequency and intensity, confirmed by video/electroencephalography (VEEG) monitoring with left frontotemporal onset. A low-grade tumor was suspected, given a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study demonstrating enlargement of the left amygdala, anterior hippocampus, and adjacent mesial temporal neocortex, with modest gadolinium enhancement, and a positron emission tomography (PET) scan showing increased metabolism within that region. Surgical resection of the left mesial temporal lobe was performed and pathology revealed pathogen-free granulomas. She was given a diagnosis of sarcoidosis (following chest computed tomography that showed hilar adenopathy). She was treated with oral steroids for neurosarcoidosis with no further epileptic seizures in 19 months of follow-up. The second case was a young man, with known pulmonary sarcoidosis, who developed simple partial seizures and, later, complex partial seizures, with MRI revealing a left insular mass. Stereotactic biopsy again demonstrated pathogen-free granulomas. He has also done well in 4 years of follow-up. Review of the literature suggests that seizures associated with sarcoidosis do not invariably imply a poor prognosis. Certain features—multifocal parenchymal involvement, hydrocephalus, and chronic meningitis—were associated with poor outcome. In contrast, cases with isolated mass lesions often fared well.

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Keywords: Neurosarcoidosis; Sarcoidosis; Temporal lobe epilepsy; Seizures; Amygdala; Hippocampus; Positron emission tomography; Brain mass lesion

1. Introduction

Neurosarcoidosis is seen in 5% of systemic sarcoidosis patients, with only about 50% having a prior diagnosis when the nervous system becomes involved [1,2]. Seizures are estimated to occur in 5–20% of neurosarcoidosis patients [1,2]. The neurologic manifestations

of sarcoidosis that may contribute to development of seizures are protean and include parenchymal abnormalities including encephalopathy/vasculopathy (5–10%), intraparenchymal mass lesion(s) (5–10%), endocrinopathy with metabolic disturbance including hypothalamic and/or pituitary dysfunction (10–15%), meningeal disease (including aseptic meningitis and meningeal mass) (10–20%), and hydrocephalus (10%) [1]. Most reports indicate a poor prognosis with severe progressing or relapsing course when seizures are

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48 associated with sarcoidosis [2–4]. We describe two cases
49 of epilepsy and sarcoidosis from our institution who
50 have done well, as well as review the literature.

51 2. First case history

52 A 37-year-old white, right-handed woman (Case 1)
53 developed stereotypical episodes 7 months earlier fol-
54 lowing a “superviral” infection. She had swollen
55 “glands in her neck making it hard to swallow.” Her
56 husband came home from work to find her passed out
57 on the floor. She was evaluated in the emergency room
58 and sent home. She then began experiencing brief (40–
59 60 seconds), stereotyped episodes of a “wave” over the
60 back of her head, fuzzy feeling in her face, and a feeling
61 that she might lose her breath. These were initially
62 occurring weekly but, within 6 months, were occurring
63 several times per day. When several occurred in close
64 succession, she noted difficulty in finding words. During
65 an episode she would often stop what she was doing,
66 and people would express concern. She was able to talk
67 throughout and even drove through one event without
68 incident.

69 She was the product of a normal gestation, labor, and
70 delivery, including an identical twin, without seizures.
71 There was no history of febrile seizures or significant
72 brain trauma. Her medical history was notable for a
73 monophasic illness a decade earlier with glomerular
74 nephritis with a “lupuslike syndrome” from which she
75 completely recovered. Family history included a teenage
76 daughter with primary generalized epilepsy treated by
77 the authors. A high school graduate, the patient worked

78 as a receptionist and had three children. Her neurologic
79 examination was normal. Magnetic resonance imaging
80 revealed a hazy, enhancing area within the left amygdala
81 and adjacent temporal neocortex. She was started on
82 phenytoin, resulting in reduction of the episodes to
83 one per week. The patient did not follow up until 5 years
84 later, when, while on antiepileptic medications, she expe-
85 rienced a marked increase in seizure frequency from one
86 per week to several per day. She was concerned that her
87 thinking was impaired with some of the episodes. These
88 episodes persisted despite trials of carbamazepine, leveti-
89 racetam, and lamotrigine.

90 VEEG study captured seven events. In five events she
91 reported a “fuzzy” feeling in her head and noted that
92 her stomach felt “weird,” with behavioral arrest and
93 minor lip smacking or mouth pursing in two. EEG re-
94 cords during these five events plus two without identified
95 clinical accompaniments exhibited rhythmic theta in the
96 left frontotemporal region at times evolving centrally
97 (Fig. 1).

98 Neuropsychological testing revealed a wide range of
99 verbal skills including confrontational naming, fluency,
100 and abstraction below expected premorbid abilities.
101 MRI showed enlargement of left amygdala, hippocam-
102 pal head, and the adjacent temporal neocortical region
103 with bright signal on T2 and FLAIR sequences and pat-
104 chy gadolinium enhancement, suggestive of low-grade
105 neoplasm (Fig. 2). PET showed increased metabolism
106 in the abnormal structures (Fig. 3).

107 Surgical resection of the left anterior temporal lobe was
108 performed, and specimens were obtained for study. Neu-
109 ropathology analysis revealed granulomatous inflamma-
110 tion of brain parenchyma and perivascular spaces

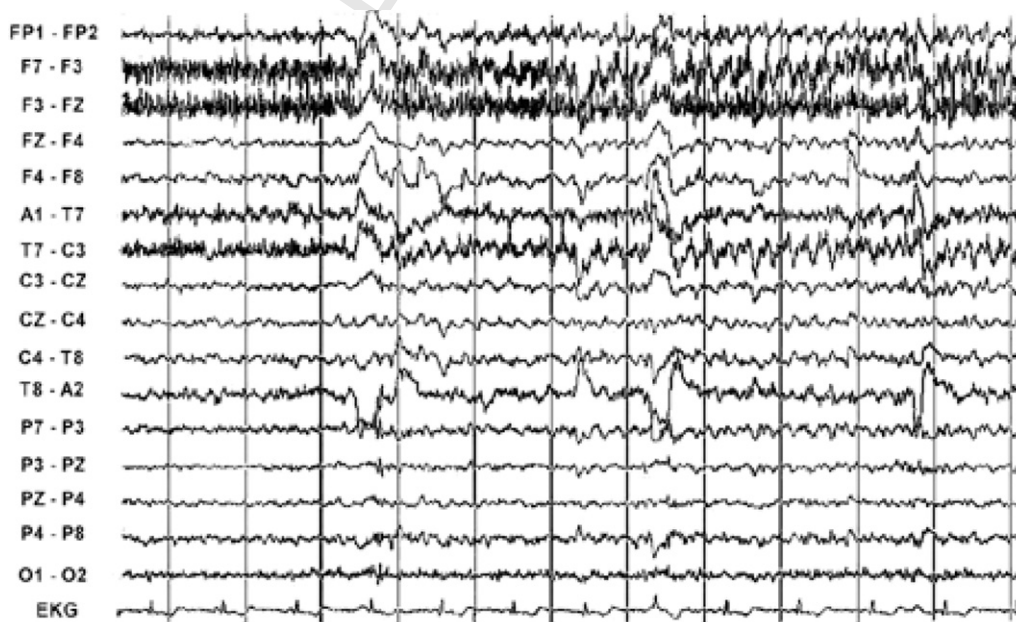


Fig. 1. EEG record showing seizure with left frontotemporal onset. The calibration bar represents 90 μ V, 1 second. High-frequency filter was 35 Hz.

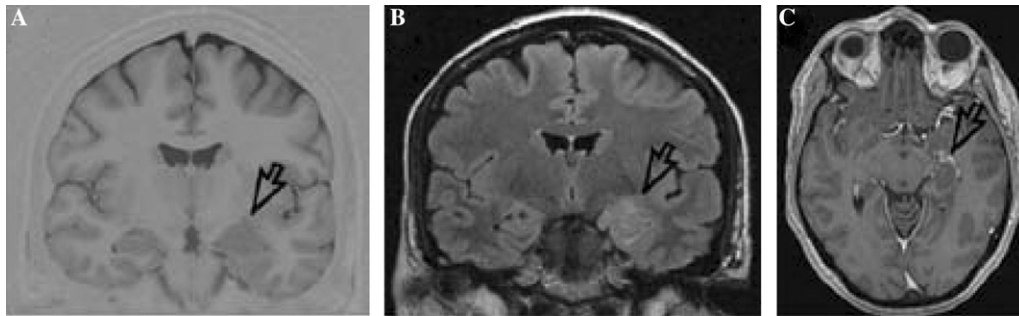


Fig. 2. (A) This MRI image shows enlargement of left amygdala, hippocampal head, and adjacent neocortex on inversion recovery weighted T1 sequence. (B) Bright signal is seen within the abnormal structures on FLAIR. (C) Gadolinium produced patchy enhancement. Arrows identify the abnormal region.

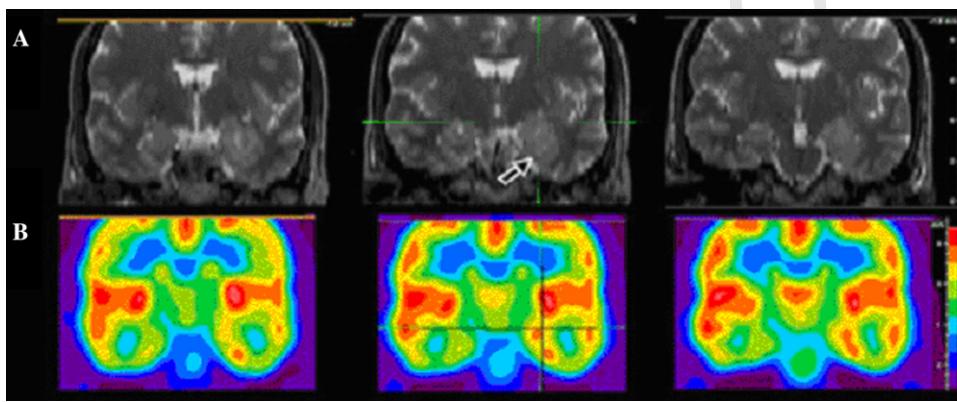


Fig. 3. (A) Successive 3-mm T2-weighted images anterior (left) to posterior (right) showing enlarged amygdala and anterior hippocampus on the left (see arrow). (B) Corresponding PET scans are seen below with hypermetabolism in the abnormal region.

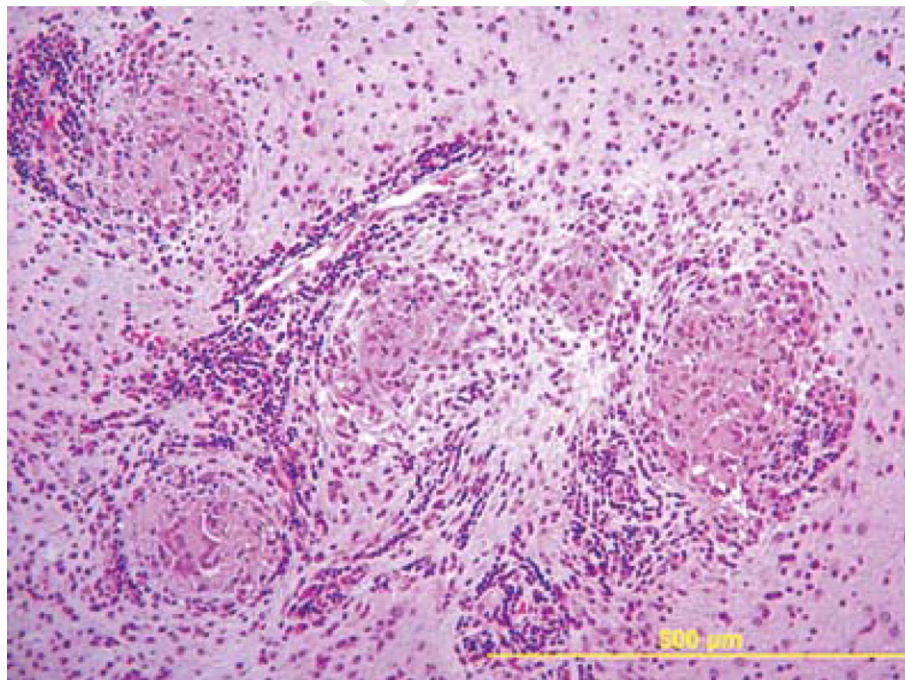


Fig. 4. Confluent areas of granuloma within the amygdala consistent with sarcoidosis.

111 without evidence of vasculitis within the amygdala, hip-
112 pocampus, and temporal cortex (Fig. 4).

113 No organisms were seen on acid-fast stain or gram
114 stain and no polarizable foreign material was observed.
115 Serum fluorescent treponemal antibody and lyme titers
116 were negative. Serum and cerebrospinal angiotensin-con-
117 verting enzyme levels were normal. Gallium scan did not
118 show abnormal uptake. Computed tomography of the
119 chest revealed subcarinal, mediastinal, and hilar lym-
120 phadenopathy. Pulmonary function tests were normal.

121 Prednisone, 40 mg daily, was prescribed for the CNS
122 sarcoidosis for 1 year, followed by a taper. Her neuro-
123 psychological functioning and neuroimaging tests,
124 showing typical postoperative changes, have remained
125 stable for more than 17 months. She has had no further
126 epileptic seizures while maintained on her preoperative
127 dose of lamotrigine, though nonepileptic events docu-
128 mented by VEEG monitoring occurred in association
129 with reports of recurrent sexual abuse involving minors
130 by her father and brother.

131 3. Second case history

132 We have identified a second case of neurosarcoidosis
133 presenting with seizures. A 28-year-old white man com-
134 plained of fatigue and mouth breathing. He underwent
135 reduction of nasal turbinates but also had a chest
136 X-ray consistent with hilar adenopathy. He was diag-
137 nosed with sarcoidosis and started on 5 mg of predni-
138 sone daily. At age 31, he developed episodes of anxiety
139 and a metallic taste in his mouth lasting for seconds
140 every several weeks. He saw a neurologist 3 years later
141 when the episodes progressed to confusion and speech
142 arrest lasting 10–30 seconds two to three times daily.
143 MRI revealed a lesion with increased signal on T2 and
144 FLAIR sequences in the left superior frontal insula
145 and subinsular region, with mild mass effect on the lat-
146 eral ventricle and gadolinium enhancement. Pathology
147 of a subinsular stereotactic biopsy identified pathogen-
148 free, noncasseating granuloma. Prednisone was in-
149 creased to 10 mg per day. He has done well during 4
150 years of follow-up, though simple partial seizures occur
151 about once per week on carbamazepine therapy. MRI 3
152 years after biopsy showed marked improvement, though
153 a ribbon of abnormal signal remains in the superior
154 frontal insula with modest enhancement.

4. Literature review of neurosarcoidosis and seizures

155

156 Delaney [3] reviewed reports published over 50 years,
157 through 1980, of 500 patients with neurosarcoidosis, of
158 54 whom had seizures (11%). Of those with seizures,
159 60% died and an additional 15% had significant morbid-
160 ity. The mean survival was 9 months when three patients
161 who survived more than 249 months were excluded; half
162 the deaths occurred in 4 months. He noted that eight pa-
163 tients did well and six were lost to follow-up. “Nearly all
164 had granulomatous meningitis,” but 11 (20 %) had a
165 space-occupying mass lesion. He commented that those
166 with solitary mass lesions seemed to “fare better after
167 craniotomy.”

168 More recent case series continue to show markedly
169 variable mortality in neurosarcoid but consistently dem-
170 onstrate higher mortality when seizures manifest (Table
171 1). Mortality is increased 20% to nearly 10-fold when
172 seizures occur in neurosarcoidosis [4–7]. How does neu-
173 rosarcoidosis presentation affect prognosis? We have
174 identified 277 cases of neurosarcoidosis in the literature,
175 43 of whom had seizures (16%). In only 40 cases were
176 clinical, neuroradiologic, or pathologic descriptions suf-
177 ficient. Of these 40 cases, only 28 were followed up either
178 to death or, for survivors, to a minimum of 1 year. These
179 28 cases plus the 2 from our institution are detailed in
180 Table 2 and summarized in Table 3.

181 Of the 30 patients with neurosarcoidosis and seizures,
182 14 (47%) died. Death occurred 1 month to 10 years fol-
183 lowing onset of CNS symptoms, with average and med-
184 ian times to death of 2.7 and 2.0 years, respectively.
185 Thirty-three percent had good neurologic function for
186 up to 19 years. Follow-up in survivors was 5.0 years
187 on average, with a median of 3.5 years. Seizure type
188 did affect survival. Focal seizures (focal sensory, focal
189 motor, or complex partial seizures) with or without sec-
190 ondary generalization were described in 10 patients; 9
191 had only generalized tonic-clonic seizures. Death was
192 more frequent (about doubled) for those with only gen-
193 eralized tonic-clonic seizures (40%) compared with focal
194 seizures (20%). Timing of seizures did not affect outcome
195 as patients with seizures within the first 6 months of neu-
196 rosarcoidosis fared no better than those with later onset
197 of seizures. There were no reports that seizures were a
198 direct cause of any deaths. Only Krumholz et al. [5] de-
199 scribed seizure control. Eight of ten had complete sei-
200 zure control, and of these, six did well. Of the two

Table 1
Mortality in neurosarcoidosis with and without seizures in four case series

Reference	Neurosarcoid with seizures		Neurosarcoid without seizure	
	Patient No.	No. of deaths (%)	Patient No.	No. of deaths (%)
Delaney, 1977 [4]	6	6 (100)	10	8 (80)
Krumholz et al., 1991 [5]	13	2 (15)	66	1 (2)
Sharma, 1996 [6]	2	2 (100)	26	4 (26)
Tahmouh et al., 2002 [7]	1	1 (100)	7	4 (57)

Table 2
Clinical and anatomical manifestations of neurosarcoidosis associated with seizures and affect on clinical outcome

Patient #	[Ref.] (year)	Age/race/ gender	Sarcoid initial presentation (neurologic/ systemic)	Systemic involvement	Onset time of seizure in CNS sarcoid ^a	Seizure class ^b	Isolated focal anatomic dist. (MRI/CT/ PATH)	Multifocal anatomic dist. ^c (MRI/CT/PATH)	Clinical-focal anatomic dist. (MRI/CT/ PATH)	Meningitis	Hydrocephalus	Encephalopathy	Follow-up (years)	Status at follow-up ^d
1	[8] (1965)	30/?/F	Neurologic	Lungs, lymph nodes	NR ^e	GTC	No	Brain, PIT, MEN, SC	Yes	Yes	NR	NR	NR	Died
2	[9] (1965)	23/W/M	Neurologic	Hilar lymph nodes	Late	NR	Not isolated	NR	Yes	Yes ^f	NR	Yes	4	Poor
3	[4] (1977)	30/B/F	NR	Lungs, lymph nodes, liver	NR	NR	No	BAS MEN, PIT, HYP, CN1,CN2	Yes	Yes	NR	NR	6	Died
4		66/B/M	Neurologic	Lungs, lymph nodes, liver, kidneys	Early	NR	No	HYP,BAS MEN, hemispheres, BS, CER	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	0.1	Died
5		30/B/M	Neurologic	Hilar lymph node, lungs, spleen	NR	NR	No	BAS MEN, CN2, BS, HYP, PIT, temporal lobe, 3rd ventricle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1.5	Died
6		33/B/M	NR	Lungs, lymph nodes, liver, eye	NR	NR	No	BAS MEN, HYP, PIT, CN7, Optic Chiasm	Yes	Yes	NR	No	4	Died
7		28/B/M	Neurologic	Lymph node, Lung, liver, spleen	Early*	NR	No	BAS MEN, aqueduct, CER, caudate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0.5	Died
8		29/B/F	Neurologic	Lymph node, lung, spleen, heart	NR	NR	No	BAS MEN, HYP, PIT, ventricles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	Died
9	[10] (1983)	61/B/M	Sarcoid	Lymph node, spleen	Late	GTC	No	MEN, CN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	Died
10		36/B/M	Sarcoid	Lymph nodes, liver, spleen, pancreas	Early*	FS, GTC	No	MEN, HYP, PIT, CN, SC, ventricles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	Died
11		29/B/F	Sarcoid	Lungs, uveitis	Late	GTC	No	BAS MEN, HYP, CN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	Died
12	[11] (1986)	33/B/F	Sarcoid	Eye, lungs, liver, spleen, heart	Late	NR	No	BAS MEN, ventricles, HYP, PIT, CN, SC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	0.75	Died
13	[5] (1991)	58/B/M	Neurologic	Lung	Early*	FM, GTC	Not isolated	Diffuse plus temporal mass	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes	1	Died
14		21/B/F	ND	Skin, lymph node	Early*	GTC	NR	NR	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes	4	Died
15		20/W/M	Neurologic	None	Early*	FS, GTC	Parietal mass	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	3	Good
16		35/B/M	NR	Eye	Late	GTC	Dural mass	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	3	Good
17		25/W/F	Neurologic	None	Early*	FS, GTC	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	Yes	3	Poor
18		30/B/F	NR	Skin, lung, liver, stomach	Late	GTC	Not isolated	CER mass	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes	1	Good
19		25/M/B	Neurologic	Lymph node, nasal sinuses	Early*	GTC	No	Yes	NR	NR	NR	Yes	4	Vision loss
20		17/B/F	NR	Lymph nodes, eye, lung	Late	GTC	Not isolated	CN7, plus temporal mass	Yes	Yes	Yes	NR	2	Good
21		31/W/M	Neurologic	None	Early*	FS, GTC	NR	CN7, SC	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes	19	Good
22		23/B/F	NR	Lung, eye	Early*	FS,GTC	NR	NR	NR	Yes	NR	NR	3	Good
23	[6] (1996)	61/W/F	Neurologic	Lacrimal, glands, spleen	NR	"Seizure"	ND	NR	NR	CN 7, proptosis	NR	NR	10	Good
24		36/W/F	NR	Parotid, lymph nodes	Early*	"Seizure"	NR	MRI "abnormal"	NR	NR	NR	NR	5	Good
25	[12] (2001)	61/M	NR	NR	Early*	FS	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	>5	Minor
26		35/M	NR	NR	Early*	GTC	NR	MRI "supertentorial," cerebellar	Yes	NR	NR	NR	>5	Poor
27		39/F	NR	NR	Early*	FS	NR	Supra- and infratentorial	Yes	NR	NR	NR	>5	Minor

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Patient #	[Ref.] (year)	Age/race/gender	Sarcoid initial presentation (neurologic/systemic)	Systemic involvement	Onset time of seizure in CNS sarcoid ^a	Seizure class ^b	Isolated focal anatomic dist. (MRI/CT/PATH)	Multifocal anatomic dist. (MRI/CT/PATH)	Clinical-focal anatomic dist. (MRI/CT/PATH)	Meningitis	Hydrocephalus	Encephalopathy	Follow-up (years)	Status at follow-up ^d
28	[7] (2002)	36/B/F	Sarcoid	Parotid, lung	NR	GTC	NR	"Brain" on MRI	CN7	No	NR	NR	2	Died
29	Case 1	37/W/F	Neurologic Sarcoid	Hilar lymph node Lung	Early*	FS	Temporal Lobe Insular Cortex	No	No	No	No	No	6.5	Good
30	Case 2	33/W/M	Sarcoid	Lung	Early*	FS		No	No	No	No	No	7	Good

^a Early, first 6 months; Early*, seizures were present as initial neurologic manifestation.

^b FS, focal sensory, focal motor, or complex partial; GTC, generalized tonic-clonic.

^c PTT, pituitary; MEN, meningitis; SC, spinal cord; BAS MEN, basal meningitis; HYP, hypothalamus; CN, cranial nerves; BS, brainstem; Cer, cerebellum.

^d Good = improvement with no significant neurologic dysfunction; poor = significant encephalopathy and, needing some but not continuous care in daily living; minor = symptoms not interfering with lifestyle [12].

^e NR, not reported.

^f Four years earlier and then right temporal parenchymal and meningeal mass.

intractable patients, one had continued generalized tonic-clonic seizures and neurologic deterioration, and died within 4 years. The second had persistent complex partial and generalized tonic-clonic seizures with significant dementia. One of our two cases was also completely controlled on medication, though only after temporal lobectomy. Our second case had only simple partial seizures on medication.

Outcome varied with neurologic presentation. Meningitis and hydrocephalus were associated with the highest mortality, 79 and 75%, respectively. Mortality was also high in multifocal disease (57%) and in widespread disease indicated by encephalopathy (73%). In contrast, isolated mass lesions occurred in only four patients (three parenchymal and one dural), but none died and all had good outcome. Three additional patients without hydrocephalus, meningitis, encephalopathy, or multifocal disease also had good outcomes. Meningitis may present variably as an acute monophasic illness, a relapsing course, or a chronic progressive illness. The last clinical course was confirmed on autopsy in more than 11 of 14 patients with meningitis, with the remainder presumably less aggressive. Though mortality was high when neurosarcoidosis was associated with hydrocephalus, this was not absolute and one such patient was followed 19 years.

5. Discussion

We described a woman followed more than 6 years with slow worsening of seizures and also enlargement of a left temporal abnormality seen on MRI with modest enhancement. This lesion was hypermetabolic on PET scan. Though the time course and neuroimaging characteristics were interpreted to be most consistent with a low-grade neoplasm, analysis of resected brain tissue revealed pathogen-free granulomas. Subsequently, hilar and mediastinal adenopathy was identified, consistent with a diagnosis of sarcoidosis. As in our case, lung is commonly also affected (74–94% of cases). Other organ systems are less commonly affected: skin (30%), eyes (37%), liver (13%), and heart (11%) [1].

Neurologic manifestations and MRI imaging characteristics are myriad. Magnetic resonance imaging is abnormal in 80% and will show periventricular T2 or FLAIR signal abnormalities (46%), multiple supratentorial and infratentorial lesions (36%), solitary intraaxial mass lesions (9%), solitary extraaxial mass (5%), and leptomeningeal enhancement (36%) [13,14].

The temporal mass diagnosed by MRI in our case was shown to be hypermetabolic on PET. Systemic sarcoidosis is hypermetabolic on PET scan and may also lead to an initial working diagnosis of neoplasm [15]. However, [¹⁸F]fluorodeoxyglucose ([¹⁸F]FDG) PET may have a role in diagnosis and follow-up of sarcoidosis and neurosarcoidosis [1,16–18]. Increased cellular up-

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Table 3
Summary of neurosarcoidosis and seizures

	N	Died	Major morbidity	Minor morbidity	Good
Seizures	30	14(47%)	3(10%)	3(10%)	10(33%)
Seizure characteristics					
Early seizures	16	5(31%)	2(12%)	3(19%)	6(38%)
Late seizures	7	3(43%)	1(14%)	0(0%)	3(43%)
GTC (without FS)	9	4(44%)	1(11%)	1(11%)	3(33%)
FS (with/without GTC)	10	2(20%)	1(70%)	2(20%)	5(50%)
Effect of neurologic presentation on outcome					
Isolated focal lesion	4(13%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	4(100%)
Multifocal abnormalities	23(77%)	13(57%)	3(13%)	2(9%)	5(22%)
No multifocal abnormalities	7(23%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(14%)	6(86%)
Meningitis	14(47%)	11(79%)	1(7%)	0(0%)	2(14%)
No meningitis	16(53%)	3(19%)	2(12%)	3(19%)	8(50%)
Hydrocephalus	12(40%)	9(75%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(25%)
No hydrocephalus	18(60%)	5(27%)	3(17%)	3(17%)	7(40%)
Encephalopathy	15(50%)	10(73%)	2(13%)	1(6%)	2(13%)
No encephalopathy	15(50%)	4(27%)	1(7%)	2(13%)	8(53%)

take of [¹⁸F]FDG is related to inflammatory cell infiltrates that are composed of lymphocytes, macrophages, and epithelioid cells. [¹⁸F]FDG accumulates in lung and hilar lymph nodes in sarcoidosis patients. Uptake by lung tissue has been shown to be concordant with histologic activity of pulmonary sarcoidosis and decreases after high-dose steroid therapy.

Similarly, one group found that sarcoidosis activity in the heart was best followed by PET (compared with gallium scan and SPECT) [18]. Though whole-body FDG-PET may be useful in assessing systemic involvement and response of sarcoidosis to therapy, the effects of neurosarcoidosis on brain metabolism are complex, with Dubey et al. reporting hypometabolism of temporal lesions [19].

The specific neurologic manifestations of sarcoidosis associated with seizures profoundly affect outcome. Seizures accompanying meningitis or hydrocephalus are highly associated with poor outcome, as is multifocal disease including encephalopathy. In contrast, isolated mass lesions, though relatively infrequent, appear often to be associated with good outcome. Simple partial and complex partial seizures with or without secondary generalization also are associated with better outcome than generalized tonic-clonic seizures only. This finding is likely again to be related to focal dysfunction compared with more widespread parenchymal damage. Seizures in neurosarcoidosis are often easy to control with medication. Death in neurosarcoidosis correlates with an aggressive relapsing or progressive course.

6. Conclusions

Our literature review yields several trends regarding neurosarcoidosis and seizures. Seizures are often associ-

ated with a higher occurrence of morbidity and death. Poor outcome is associated with hydrocephalus, chronic meningitis, and multifocal parenchymal disease. In contrast, an isolated mass lesion is associated with good outcome, though this pathology is relatively infrequent. Neurosarcoidosis mass lesions may mimic tumors by showing gadolinium enhancement and increased metabolism on PET scan.

Acknowledgments

This work was done while Dr. Jeffrey L. Sponsler was a clinical neurophysiology fellow at University Hospitals of Cleveland. We thank Dr. Ted Westbrook for providing us with the second case. We thank Tari Rienzo for help with the manuscript.

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