CASE REPORT

*Mycobacterium xenopi* pulmonary infection in an HIV infected patient under highly active antiretroviral treatment*

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Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) is responsible for a striking reduction in AIDS related morbidity and mortality by partly restoring immune function. However, HAART can also precipitate the development of clinically apparent opportunistic infections in patients with latent infections. We report a case of an HIV infected patient who developed granulomatous nodular and cavitatory lesions of the lungs due to *Mycobacterium xenopi* as a manifestation of the immune restoration syndrome.

**CASE REPORT**

In July 1999 treatment with zidovudine, lamivudine, and fortovase associated with cotrimoxazole was started in a 35 year old woman with HIV-1 infection in whom the CD4+ lymphocyte count was 48/mm³ and the viral load was 150 229 HIV RNA copies/ml. One month later her temperature was 38°C and isolated serum positivity for cryptococcal antigen was discovered which was controlled with fluconazole. In September 1999 she presented with cough and a fever of 38.5°C. A chest radiograph and CT scan demonstrated bilateral nodules of the lungs and cavitatory lesions in the left lower lobe, but no lymph nodes (fig 1). At this time the CD4+ lymphocyte count was 225/mm³ and the viral load was 114 HIV RNA copies/ml. The tuberculosis skin reaction was negative and liver function tests were unremarkable. Serological tests for *Coxiella burnetii*, *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*, *Chlamydia pneumoniae*, and *Legionella* were either negative or did not suggest recent infection. Direct microscopic examination of sputum was negative. Bronchoscopic examination, direct search for pathogens on bronchoalveolar lavage specimens and transbronchial biopsy specimens were normal or negative. A CT guided percutaneous biopsy of a nodule was therefore performed. Histological examination showed an epithelioid cell granuloma. As mycobacterial infection was suspected, ceftriaxone was substituted for fortovase, and antimycobacterial treatment combining isoniazid, rifampicin, and ethambutol was commenced. Cultures from one sputum out of three grew *Mycobacterium xenopi* which was sensitive to all of the drugs, whereas cultures from the transbronchial biopsy specimens were negative. A dramatic improvement in clinical symptoms and in radiographic features was observed within 2 months.

**DISCUSSION**

The development of opportunistic infections during the first 2 months of HAART has been most commonly observed. Unfortunately, HAART can also precipitate the development of clinically apparent opportunistic infections in patients with latent infections within the first weeks of treatment.

We report a *Mycobacterium xenopi* pulmonary infection presenting with granulomatous nodular and cavitatory lesions as a complication of the immune restoration syndrome.

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include streptomycin, ethionamide, and ethambutol or rifampicin continued for 18–24 months seems reasonable. In vitro drug susceptibility and response to chemotherapy are unpredictable. In a few cases surgical resection resulted in cure when antibiotics were ineffective. Of note, diagnosis of uncommon—that is, other than \textit{M avium} complex and \textit{M kansasii}—non-tuberculous mycobacterial disease in HIV negative patients relies on the criteria of the American Thoracic Society: (a) either repeated isolation from a non-sterile site or a single isolation of \textit{M xenopi} from a normally sterile localisation and (b) either the presence of one or more symptoms indicative of pulmonary disease or an abnormal chest radiograph, in the absence of other pathogens or illnesses.

\textit{Mycobacterium xenopi} has been reported as being responsible for pulmonary and extrapulmonary infections in HIV infected patients. Fever and cough are common symptoms in these patients, and fever is significantly more frequent in patients with AIDS than in non-AIDS patients. Radiographic findings include interstitial and mixed disease, rarely a reticulonodular pattern and cavitary disease, but adenopathy is unusual. Most patients have advanced HIV infection with a CD4 cell count of <100/mm$^3$. Differential diagnosis includes \textit{Pneumocystis carinii} pneumonia, other mycobacterial infections, and sarcoidosis which has also recently been described as the result of the immune restoration syndrome.

In our patient the diagnosis of \textit{M xenopi} pulmonary infection was likely on clinical, radiological, and histological findings, despite only one specimen of sputum being positive for the organism. Indeed, the diagnostic criteria of the American Thoracic Society were not fulfilled. However, we consider that this result should not be attributed to environmental contamination.

**REFERENCES**


**Figure 1** CT scan of the chest showing multiple nodular lesions and cavitation of the left lower lobe.