Sudden Aphasia Occurred in a Postpartum Woman

Key words: neuropsychiatric SLE, MRI, T2 prolonged lesion

A 34-year-old woman had a continuous low-grade fever for one month after giving birth to her second baby. She felt sudden severe headache, and found herself unable to tell where she was or when it was. Furthermore she could not recognize the meaning of written words (aphasia). Laboratory examination revealed pancytopenia, low value of serum complements, and positive autoantibodies. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of her brain documented T2 prolonged lesion in the left temporal lobe, which was suggested to be an edematous or ischemic change occurring in association with vasculitis (Fig. A). We diagnosed that the lesion on MRI was responsible for her peculiar symptoms of aphasia and disorientation followed by headache as a symptom of neuropsychiatric SLE (NP-SLE). Prednisolone at a dose of 1 mg/kg/day was administered and her symptoms rapidly disappeared. The T2 prolonged lesion disappeared in one month (Fig. B).

The onset of SLE during pregnancy and the postpartum period is seen in 20% of patients. The headache in NP-SLE is characterized by an acute presentation, and is frequently associated with other neurological complications and abnormal laboratory tests. MRI lesions are observed in 15–78% of patients with active NP-SLE, but there is no specific finding for NP-SLE.

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