INTRODUCTION

Pleural effusion is the accumulation of fluid in the pleural cavity, and be caused by chylothorax, hemothorax, empyema, hydrothorax, or leakage of central-line fluid. Congenital chylothorax is the most common form of pleural effusion in the prenatal period despite it is rare. The etiology of this condition isn’t clear, but it is thought to be related to congenital malformations of the lymphatic system. The overall mortality rate is 25%-50%, but it could be higher. Congenital chylothorax complicated with hydrops in a premature newborn is an uncommon and serious clinical problem. We report a case of a congenital bilateral chylothorax with early and severe prenatal presentation. The outcome was bad, with neonatal death, despite all the efforts in his management.

CASE REPORT

The authors present a case of a 33-year-old pregnant woman followed in our obstetric department since 27 weeks of gestation, after the diagnosis of bilateral pleural effusion. The patient had no relevant medical history.
and no children, with two previous 1st trimester fetal losses. Her blood type was O Rh positive. Her pregnancy surveillance was normal, with unremarkable ultrasounds at 12 and 22 weeks. At 26 weeks gestation, pleural effusion was diagnosed by routine scan and the patient was referred to our hospital. At 27 weeks, after confirmation of an isolated pleural effusion, the parents were informed about the prognosis and diagnostic/therapeutic options and refused any invasive procedure. Fetal echocardiography at 28 weeks was normal. The 29 weeks scan revealed a fetus in the 75th percentile with normal amniotic fluid index, no signs of fetal anemia and mild pleural effusion. Lab results for viral infections (TORCH group, parvovirus B19 and VDRL) were negative. At this time she started fetal lung maturation with four administrations of intramuscular dexamethasone (6 mg each). Two weeks later, as the pleural effusion increased significantly (Figure 1), the parents agreed to perform an amniocentesis and thoracocentesis; 60 ml of yellow-colored fluid were drained from the left side. Fetal karyotype was normal (46, XY) and the cytological analysis of the fluid demonstrated a white cell count greater than 1000/μl, with 99% of lymphocytes, suggestive of congenital chylothorax. Control ultrasound at 32 weeks (1 week after the procedure) revealed a large bilateral pleural effusion (Figures 3 and 4), polyhydramnios and signs of hydrops. Insertion of a double-pigtailed pleuro-amniotic shunt was attempted, without success, followed by a repeated thoracocentesis in the same day, which was
unsuccessful. The patient was then transferred to the obstetrics emergency department for surveillance and an emergency cesarean section was performed some hours later for suspected fetal distress. A male newborn weighing 2325g was delivered, but, despite all efforts (endotracheal intubation, thoracocentesis, cardiac massage, adrenaline, volume expansion) the Apgar score was 1-0-0 at 1st, 5th and 10th minutes, with neonatal death declared 30 minutes after birth.

DISCUSSION

The congenital chylothorax case presented had an early and severe presentation and the parents were very reluctant to perform invasive procedures. Prolonged severe fetal pleural effusion can compromise normal lung maturation and progress to fetal hydrops, ultimately resulting in premature birth and pulmonary hypoplasia, with a high rate of intrauterine death and perinatal mortality. Despite the effort in antenatal treatment with thoracocentesis, the fetus developed hydrops and the reanimation after delivery was unsuccessful. The majority of authors recognize the advantages of prenatal diagnosis, ultrasound monitoring and prompt therapeutic interventions in these cases. Prenatal therapy is a prognostic modifier, preventing the most severe forms of hydrops and pulmonary hypoplasia. An overall mortality up to 50% has been reported in some series, with poor prognosis associated with: diagnosis before 32 weeks, delivery before 35 weeks and coexistence of hydrops\(^6\). When poor prognostic factors are present, some authors report mortality rates higher than 90%. Our case combined all these poor prognostic factors and, despite the efforts, ended with the newborn death.

REFERENCES


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