Disappearance of FDG uptake on PET scan after antimicrobial therapy could help for the diagnosis of *Coxiella burnetii* spondylodiscitis

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Accepted 11 March 2016

DESCRIPTION

A 55 year-old man was admitted for worsening of a chronic low back pain associated with L4-L5 anterolisthesis, despite taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for several months. He had a medical history of high blood pressure and obesity (body mass index, 37 kg/m²). He lived in the countryside but had no direct contact with animals except his dog. There were no fever, chills, sweats or weight loss. C reactive protein (CRP) was <2.9 mg/L. Radiographs showed L4-L5 anterolisthesis with endplate erosions and bony sclerosis (figure 1A). On MRI (figure 1B), there was a significant enhancement of L4-L5 vertebral endplates and paravertebral soft tissues. Positron emission tomography (PET) CT scan showed an intense uptake of the L4-L5 space (figure 1C). Blood and CT-guided discovertebral cultures remained sterile (including for mycobacteria) and 16s PCR and in-house specific *Coxiella burnetii* PCR were negative. *C. burnetii* serology (Focus diagnostics Q fever immunofluorescent

antibody IgG and IgM test kits) was positive and in favour of a chronic Q fever (phase I, IgG 2048; phase II, IgG 4096; IgM were negative). *Brucella* and *Bartonella* were negative. An echocardiogram was performed to exclude vegetations caused by bacterial endocarditis. The patient was treated with doxycycline (200 mg/day) and hydroxychloroquine (400 mg/day) for 10 months. A significant improvement with reduction of the back pain was noticed and the CRP remained <2.9 mg/L. The antibody titres decreased and the pathological uptake of the L4-L5 space on PET scan disappeared when antibiotics were stopped (figure 1D).

Q fever is a worldwide zoonotic acute or chronic infection.¹ Osteoarticular localisations are infrequent, insidious and remain difficult to diagnose.^{2,3} PCRs performed on bone biopsy could be negative. Disappearance of a significant spine uptake on PET CT scan and decreasing of antibody titres could help for treatment discontinuation during *C. burnetii* spondylodiscitis.

Figure 1 (A) Lateral lumbar radiograph revealing a L4-L5 anterolisthesis; (B) MRI of the lumbar spine, T1-weighted gadolinium sequence, showing a gadolinium enhancement of the L4-L5 vertebral endplates; (C) Positron emission tomography (PET) scan image fusion showing an intense uptake of the L4-L5 space with a maximum standardised uptake value of 7.4; (D) PET scan image fusion showing a significant reduction of the fluorescent deoxyglucose uptake of the L4-L5 space after 10 months of treatment.

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To cite: Gaudé M, Julien S, Laurent F, et al. *BMJ Case Rep* Published online: [please include Day Month Year] doi:10.1136/bcr-2015-214008

Learning points

- ▶ *Coxiella burnetii* has to be suspected in patients with spondylodiscitis with sterile standard cultures from bone biopsy.
- ▶ *C. burnetii*-specific PCR and 16s PCR performed on bone biopsy could be negative in patients with *C. burnetii* spondylodiscitis and serology remains the cornerstone of diagnosis.
- ▶ Disappearance of a significant spine uptake on positron emission tomography CT scan and decreasing of antibody titres could help for treatment discontinuation during *C. burnetii* spondylodiscitis.

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Contributors All the authors contributed significantly to the writing of the case. TF, MG and SJ participated in the patient's care. FL performed the microbiological analyses.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent Obtained.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

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