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Anesthetic Considerations for Cervical Fusion Surgery in Advanced Rheumatoid Arthritis and Severe Pulmonary Hypertension

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Abstract

67-year-old female with a history of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and pulmonary hypertension (PH) presented for urgent C4-C5 anterior discectomy and C3-C6 posterior fusion for cervical subluxation. C-spine MRI showed severe cord impingement. The patient was brought to the operating room with minimal sedation to avoid exacerbation of PH. The radial artery was inaccessible due to flexion deformities, thus a brachial arterial line was placed. Awake fiberoptic intubation was performed with dexmedetomidine, followed by demonstration of movement of all four extremities. The anesthesia was maintained with dexmedetomidine and sevoflurane. The anterior and posterior portions of the procedure were performed uneventfully with no change in baseline somatosensory evoked potentials (SSEP) and motor evoked potentials (MEP). The patient was extubated at the end of the case and was followed in the intensive care unit (ICU) and was discharged to rehabilitation in good condition.

Imaging

C4 on C5 anterolisthesis Spinal cord impingement

Swan neck deformity Boutonniere deformity

Pulmonary Hypertension

PH is a life-threatening disease with a complex pathophysiology. The most recent classification was established in 2008. The 5 main categories are: (1) pulmonary arterial hypertension, (2) pulmonary venous hypertension due to left heart disease, (3) PH associated with lung disease, (4) chronic thromboembolic PH, and (5) PH with unclear multifactorial mechanisms. All pathways eventually lead to an altered vascular endothelium and smooth muscle function through cellular remodeling. Therapy is focused on improving hemodynamics, quality of life, and survival. The most important predictor of survival in PH is RV function.

Discussion

Patients with PH have markedly increased morbidity and mortality in the perioperative period. Preoperatively, thorough evaluation and risk assessment are necessary. Any chronic medical treatment should be continued until surgery.

The intraoperative goal is to maintain adequate preload, systemic vascular resistance and contractility in order to allow the RV to maintain cardiac output. Acute on chronic increases in pulmonary vascular resistance (PVR) during the perioperative period can be caused by hypoxia, hypercarbia, acidosis, hypothermia, pain and anxiety. Early recognition and reversal of these causes could be life saving.

This increase in RV afterload translates to increased RV transmural pressures leading to lack of perfusion of the RV myocardium throughout the perioperative period. Preoperatively, thorough evaluation and risk assessment are necessary. Any chronic medical treatment should be continued until surgery.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

The atlanto-axial joint is commonly affected in RA, causing atlanto-axial subluxation. Subaxial subluxation which occurs below C2 leads to earlier symptoms of nerve compression. Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) involvement may cause limitation of mouth opening and render direct laryngoscopy impossible. Fiberoptic intubation has improved the safety of airway management in surgical patients with RA. Where intubation is anticipated to be difficult because of cervical instability or a reduction in neck movement, an awake fiberoptic intubation and positioning of the C-spine is highly recommended.

Long term steroid therapy causes adrenal suppression, vasculitis, thin and fragile skin, which can render intravenous (IV) access difficult. The radial artery may be inaccessible because of flexion deformities of the wrist joint. Central venous catheters may be difficult to insert because of limited neck movement.

References