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Rickettsial infections: not as benign as we thought !

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Background : Rickettsiosis is a tick-borne zoonosis caused by *Rickettsia spp.* It is long believed a relatively benign disease, however severe complications may be described mainly in adults. We aim to determine clinical, biological and therapeutic characteristics of rickettsiosis.

Materials/methods : Through a retrospective study (1992-2015), all patients with rickettsial infections admitted in the Department of Infectious Diseases were enrolled. The prevalence of severe rickettsiosis as well as clinical and laboratory features were subsequently recorded.

Results : We have included 388 patients. There were 217 men (56%). Mean age was 40 ± 17 years. Nearly all patients (91%) were living in rural areas and 51.5% were diagnosed between June and August. A history of contact with animals was revealed in 91%. Mean delay of consultation was 7.9 ± 11 days. The major clinical manifestations were fever and skin rash (99.7% and 83% respectively). Joint pain was recorded in 318 patients (81.4%). Laboratory findings included typically liver cytolysis, thrombocytopenia and leucopenia (55%, 56% and 18% respectively). Hyponatremia was found in 24.4%. Seventy three patients had severe rickettsiosis (18.8%). Neurological involvement was recorded in 48 patients (12.4%) with principally meningitis in 42 cases and encephalitis in 6 cases. Acute renal failure and myocarditis were revealed in 5.9% and 1.3% respectively. Serological tests were performed in all patients. Diagnostic yield was 100% and it revealed predominantly *Rickettsia conorii* in 312 cases (80.4%) while *Rickettsia typhi* was incriminated in 49 cases (12.6%). Our patients were treated with doxycycline in 249 cases (64.2%) and/or fluoroquinolones in 87 cases (22.4%). The mean duration of treatment was 9 ± 4 days. Two patients (0.5%) died.

Conclusion : *Rickettsia* infection is the most common cause of acute fever in hot season. Although it is qualified as benign, it claims more attention because of severe forms which are frequent. An early diagnosis and prompt treatment are crucial to ensure better outcome.