

LUMBOSACRAL TRANSITIONAL VERTEBRA CAUSING BERTOLOTTI'S SYNDROME: AN UNDERDIAGNOSED CAUSE OF LOWER BACK PAIN

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INTRODUCTION:

Bertolotti's syndrome is characterised by enlargement of the transverse process of the lower most lumbar vertebra which articulates or fuses with the sacrum or ilium causing lower back pain. Its prevalence ranges between 4 to 30%, however, it rarely associated with lower back pain. Therefore, the prevalence of Bertolotti's syndrome in general population is unknown due to underdiagnosis. We are reporting on a patient whom presented to our centre with chronic lower back pain.

REPORT:

A 65 years old lady, presented with lower back pain for 10 years. However, she has never sought treatment. Her pain was localised within the lower back with no radiculopathy. Pain usually worsens when she is doing strenuous activities. She denied of claudication or instability pain. She did not complain of limb weakness or numbness and denied of urinary or bowel incontinence. No history of previous trauma. Upon clinical assessment, there was tenderness at the left paravertebral region at the level of L5 vertebra. Her neurology was intact. The radiographs showed a lumbosacral transitional vertebra, with a large left transverse process of the fifth lumbar vertebra, articulating with the ala of sacrum. In addition, the plain radiograph revealed degenerative changes of her vertebrae. Patient was given reassurance and conservative treatment was offered to her. She was started on analgesics and was referred to physiotherapy team for lower back muscle strengthening exercises. She was instructed to visit the casualty if pain worsens or appearance of neurological deficit. Patient was given an option for steroid injection if pain does not improve with conservative treatment. During her follow up after 3 months, pain had drastically improved.

She could perform her daily activities well without pain.



Figure 1: AP radiograph

CONCLUSION:

Chronic lower back pain could be the presenting sign of bertolotti's syndrome although it is an uncommon condition. Due to its rarity and variable clinical presentations, it is commonly missed and underdiagnosed. Therefore, a differential diagnosis of bertolotti's syndrome should be included in patients with chronic low back pain after ruling out all other possible causes.

REFERENCES:

Paraskevas, G., Tzaveas, A., Koutras, G. *et al.* Lumbosacral transitional vertebra causing Bertolotti's syndrome: a case report and review of the literature. *Cases Journal* **2**, 8320 (2009)