Mesial Temporal Lobe Epilepsy Syndrome Presenting as Prayer (Confounding Picture with Nonepileptic Seizures)

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Introduction and Objective

Mesial temporal lobe epilepsy associated with hippocampal sclerosis (mTLE-HS) is the most common type of focal seizure. It is characterized by an aura that is periodically followed by complex automatisms. This report describes an unusual presentation of this uncommon disease and provides excellent educational value by highlighting the difficulty in differentiating between epileptiform and non-epileptiform seizures in an adult patient with a history of both.

Case Presentation

A 34 year old patient with a history of both epileptiform and nonepileptiform seizures presented to the hospital with frequent seizures after lowering her dose of anticonvulsant medication. She had a past medical history of complex febrile seizures as a child and epilepsy starting at age 18. Her episodes were characterized by aura followed by affective behavior, automatisms and praying-like behavior. Initial electroencephalograms (EEG) were non-diagnostic, but subsequent studies demonstrated spikes consistent with mesial temporal lobe epilepsy. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) confirmed hippocampal atrophy. The patient re-established her previous dose of anticonvulsants and was discharged home.

Figure 1: T2-weighted MRI demonstrating decreases right hippocampal volume without appreciable signal abnormality.

Conclusion

Distinguishing between epileptic and psychogenic non-epileptic seizures can present a diagnostic challenge to the clinician. Careful history-taking and appropriate use of advanced diagnostic modalities, such as EEG and MRI, are crucial for this task.

Learning Points

- mTLE-HS is the most common type of focal seizure and has a distinct symptomology
- Epilepsy remains a clinical diagnosis and the diagnostic yield of EEG can be lower than expected