



Pain intensity in cluster headache - case report

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Introduction

Cluster headache has been considered as one of the worst painful conditions, based on comparisons made by patients, which includes women who underwent vaginal delivery without anesthesia. The pain is so intense that this type of headache has been termed by some as suicidal headache, due to the ideations provoked. A study involving 4876 subjects, comparing pain from different causes, revealed cluster headache as the worst of all, with an average score on the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) of 9.7, a number significantly higher than the one found in childbirth (7.2), in acute pancreatitis (7.0) and nephrolithiasis (6.9). A cluster headache attack hardly occurs simultaneously with a severe pain from another cause, allowing direct comparison.

Objective

To present a clinical case in which the individual suffered an open fracture of the Tibia and Fibula concomitantly with a cluster headache attack, allowing comparison regarding the intensity of the pain.

Case report

A 44-year-old white male patient, diagnosed six years earlier with chronic cluster headache, which became refractory to preventive treatments, and remained responsive to injectable sumatriptan and/or inhalation of moist oxygen during attacks. This patient, in general, used to rate the intensity of the pain in the attacks between 9 and 10 in the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS). Once while using injectable sumatriptan for pain relief during an attack, he fainted (syncope), falling into a position that caused open fracture of the right tibia and fibula. Having undergone orthopedic surgery, the man was asked to classify both pains that had been felt simultaneously. The pain of the cluster headache attack was rated 10 and the pain of open fracture was rated 6 by the patient. Asked to compare the suffering caused by both pains, the patient reported that the headache was much more intense than the pain caused by fracture, and added, using a colloquial expression, in Brazil: "The pain of the fracture was pleasant compared to the pain of cluster headache".

Discussion

Cluster headache pain has been considered one of the worst or even the worst among several causes of intense pain, by patients reports and studies designed for this purpose. Cluster headache will rarely be felt simultaneously with another cause of intense pain. The reported case presents the particularity of having allowed the direct comparison between two concomitant intense painful conditions and cluster headache was considered more intense than the open fracture, confirming what has been widely reported in the literature.

Keywords: Headache disorders; Cluster headache; Pain intensity.