CASE REPORT

Laminopathies: A Pandora’s box of heart failure, bradyarrhythmias and sudden death

Nuno Cabanelas *, Vítor Paulo Martins

Hospital Distrital de Santarém, Santarém, Portugal

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KEYWORDS
Laminopathy; LMNA gene mutations; Dilated cardiomyopathy

Abstract
Introduction: The LMNA gene encodes a group of proteins that have an important structural and functional role in the cell nucleus. Mutations in this gene have been found in 6% of all forms of dilated cardiomyopathy and in up to 33% of those with conduction system disturbances.

Aims and Methods: Using a case report as an example, we performed a review of the literature on the pathophysiological mechanisms, clinical manifestations, risk stratification and treatment options of cardiac involvement in laminopathies.

Case report: We present the case of a 46-year-old man, whose ECG showed bizarre voltage criteria for left ventricular hypertrophy and first-degree atrioventricular block, a dilated left ventricle with mildly impaired global systolic function and non-sustained ventricular tachycardia on Holter monitoring, and with a family history of sudden death. Genetic testing identified an LMNA mutation. No ventricular arrhythmias were induced during electrophysiological study. The patient is under close clinical and echocardiographic monitoring and an event loop recorder has been implanted.

Discussion: Phenotypically, myocardial involvement in laminopathies is indistinguishable from other forms of idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy. Ventricular arrhythmias are common, but the best method for sudden death risk stratification has yet to be established. The few studies that have been performed, with a very limited number of patients, show that factors associated with an unfavorable prognosis are ejection fraction <45%, non-sustained ventricular tachycardia, male gender and any form of atrioventricular block. Given the lack of evidence, indications for an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator for primary prevention in this context are the same as conventional indications for other forms of idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy.

Conclusions: Cardiac involvement as a consequence of LMNA mutations generally has a more aggressive natural history than other forms of non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy. A high index of suspicion and prompt referral for genetic testing are essential for appropriate therapeutic management.

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: ncabanelas@gmail.com (N. Cabanelas).

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Introduction

The proteins lamin A and C polymerize to form the nuclear lamina, a meshwork of filaments on the nucleoplasmic side of the nuclear envelope, which separates the internal nuclear membrane from chromatin and is found in all differentiated cells of the organism. This mesh has a structural function, maintaining the shape and size of the nucleus. Nuclear lamins also play a role in gene regulation, DNA replication, RNA splicing, anchoring of other nucleoplasmic proteins, function and position of nuclear pores and heterochromatin organization.

LMNA, the gene encoding lamin A/C, is located on chromosome 1 (locus 1q21.2-21.3). In 1999, an LMNA mutation was shown to cause autosomal dominant Emery-Dreifuss muscular dystrophy.

Since then, over 450 mutations in this gene have been described and are implicated in a range of other diseases, which differ in their phenotypic expression and affect various organ systems including muscles, fatty tissue and peripheral nerves, as well as systemic involvement in the case of progerias. These entities are termed laminopathies, as shown in Table 1.

Many mutations linked to laminopathies also affect the heart, in the form of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM), with or without involvement of other striated muscle, conduction disturbances and propensity for sudden death.

The mechanism through which lamin A/C deficiency causes these phenotypes is not fully understood. Two hypotheses have been proposed: one in which cell death is caused by loss of structural integrity at the nuclear level; and the other in which gene expression explains the phenotypic alterations through abnormal interaction with transcription factors in protein synthesis. The disease is expressed histologically by fibro-adipose degeneration and atrophy of the affected tissues. At the level of cell ultrastructure, there may be partial membrane rupture, disorganization of the nuclear membrane pores and vacuolization.

From the standpoint of practical cardiological management, these diseases can be considered as a single entity — cardiomyopathy associated with LMNA mutations, with or without different types of muscle involvement.

The development and accessibility of genetic study has led to more frequent identification of LMNA mutations in patients who would previously have been diagnosed as...
having idiopathic DCM. One caveat is that, as has occurred in early studies of other diseases, the initial series reported and associated prognosis may have been biased by the natural tendency to identify only cases with a more marked phenotypic expression.

Case report

A 46-year-old man, a professional soccer player until the age of 34 and currently employed by a trucking company, was referred for cardiological assessment following detection of alterations on a routine ECG.

He denied having suffered chest pain, palpitations, syncope, fainting episodes, exertional or nocturnal dyspnea, or any muscular problems. There was no relevant personal medical history.

His family history included the death of a brother two years previously at age 60 following a fall from a motorcycle. According to his family, the autopsy report, to which we did not have access, revealed that trauma was not the cause of death but gave no further details.

Physical examination showed bradycardia (50 bpm) and deviation of the apical pulse to the left. No dysmorphism or muscle or joint malformations were observed and there were no changes on neurological examination.

The baseline ECG showed sinus bradycardia, first-degree atrioventricular block (AVB), with PQ interval of 240 ms, poor R-wave progression in the precordial leads and deep S waves (41 mV in V2). The resting echocardiogram revealed left ventricular dilatation with no wall thickening, mildly depressed ejection fraction (45%) and mild diffuse hypokinesia. The ultrasound findings were confirmed by cardiac magnetic resonance imaging, which also excluded areas of late enhancement, fatty infiltration and edema.

The patient underwent treadmill exercise echocardiography to investigate repolarization abnormalities suggestive of ischemia, arrhythmia and overall contractility. He achieved 14 min 48 s with the Bruce protocol. Increasingly frequent polymorphic ventricular extrasystoles were observed, with wide QRS complexes, and at peak exercise, pairs with the R wave close to the T peak. Ventricular contractility at peak exercise was strong, with almost complete systolic obliteration of the left ventricular cavity.

On 24-hour Holter monitoring, ventricular tachycardia (VT) with five bizarre polymorphic complexes were documented, together with a period of idioventricular rhythm at 70 bpm.

In the light of the findings of mild systolic dysfunction, first-degree AVB and sinus bradycardia, arrhythmic response to exercise and a short run of polymorphic VT, the patient was referred for genetic testing for LMNA mutations. The mutation c.1039G>A was found in heterozygosity in exon 6 of the lamin A/C gene, which leads to substitution of an amino acid at position 347 of the protein (p.Glu347Lys) and is a known cause of DCM.

It was decided to perform electrophysiological study (EPS) for stratification of arrhythmic risk, which showed an atrial-His interval of 186 ms, His-ventricle interval of 60 ms, and an antegrade Wenckebach point of 635 ms. Sinus node recovery time was normal. Right ventricular pacing in the apex and outflow tract with 600- and 400-ms drive cycle lengths and up to three extrastimuli at intervals of at least 200 ms did not trigger sustained ventricular arrhythmias. Given the failure to induce ventricular arrhythmias during EPS and the patient’s refusal to have an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD), it was decided to maintain clinical follow-up and six-monthly echocardiograms and to implant an event loop recorder with remote monitoring.

The results of genetic testing of the patient’s first-degree relatives are awaited.

Discussion

No specific feature has so far been identified that distinguishes cardiomyopathy associated with LMNA mutations from other forms of idiopathic DCM. It is characterized by dilatation and systolic dysfunction of one or both ventricles, myocyte destruction and myocardial fibrosis, and it is thus necessary to investigate more common etiologies of DCM.

LMNA mutations are found in 6% of all cases of DCM, in 7.5% of familial forms and in 3.6–11% of sporadic forms. They have also been identified in 33% of DCM patients with conduction system disease; the prevalence of variants of uncertain significance in the general healthy population is estimated at 4%.

In Portugal, the incidence of this etiology in patients with non-ischemic DCM is currently being assessed in the FATIMA study, mutations in the LMNA gene being investigated in all the subjects included.

While the pattern of transmission is generally autosomal dominant, cases have been reported of an autosomal recessive pattern and of sporadic mutations. Penetrance is virtually 100% in carriers by the age of 60, with phenotypic expression of varying severity.

The conduction system can be affected at practically all levels, and disturbances typically occur before ventricular dilatation.

Of the more than 30 genes in which mutations have been identified as causing DCM, only two are also associated with

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**Table 1** Laminopathies.

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<tr>
<th>Striated muscle disease</th>
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<td>Emery-Dreifuss muscular dystrophy</td>
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<td>Congenital muscular dystrophy</td>
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<td>Limb-girdle muscular dystrophy type 1B</td>
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<td>Dilated cardiomyopathy</td>
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<th>Lipodystrophy</th>
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<td>Dunnigan lipodystrophy</td>
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<td>Lipoatrophy with diabetes and insulin resistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lipoatrophy without insulin resistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandibuloacral dysplasia</td>
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<th>Peripheral neuropathy</th>
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<td>Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 2B1</td>
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<th>Premature aging disease (progerias)</th>
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<td>Werner syndrome</td>
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<td>Hutchinson-Gilford syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restrictive dermopathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progeroid variant</td>
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<td>Mandibuloacral dysplasia</td>
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Some known risk factors were present in the case presented, including male gender, non-sustained VT on Holter monitoring, first-degree AVB and ventricular dilatation. Nevertheless, given the lack of indications for ICD implantation or pacemaker with a level of evidence A or B (no higher than first-degree and predominantly supra-Hisian AVB and asymptomatic) and the failure to induce ventricular arrhythmias on EPS (of uncertain significance), together with the patient’s refusal of this option, it was decided to implant an event loop recorder for remote continuous heart rhythm monitoring to detect conduction blocks or ventricular arrhythmias, even if asymptomatic.

Conclusion

Mutations in the lamin A/C genes result in the phenotype of various diseases, most related to the musculoskeletal system. Cardiac involvement can be manifested by dilatation and systolic dysfunction, ventricular arrhythmias and conduction disturbances. Male gender, non-sustained VT on Holter monitoring, increased PR interval and ejection fraction <45% are the risk factors for sudden death so far described in small series. The role of EPS in stratifying arrhythmic risk has yet to be established.

A high index of suspicion and referral for genetic testing are essential to improve the prognosis of affected patients given the particularly aggressive course of the disease compared to most other forms of DCM.

Ethical disclosures

Protection of human and animal subjects. The authors declare that no experiments were performed on humans or animals for this study.

Confidentiality of data. The authors declare that they have followed the protocols of their work center on the publication of patient data.

Right to privacy and informed consent. The authors have obtained the written informed consent of the patients or subjects mentioned in the article. The corresponding author is in possession of this document.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

References

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