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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

G. Zuccoli

Reply to J. Žižka et al.: Spontaneous regression of low-grade astrocytomas: an underrecognized condition?

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Sir,
I read with interest the Letter to the Editor by Žižka et al. [1] describing the spontaneous regression of a pilocytic astrocytoma involving the hypothalamus and optic pathways. Histopathologically, the vast majority of optic-pathways gliomas are pilocytic astrocytomas. The course of optic gliomas depends mainly on their location in the optic pathways. In fact, when located posterior to the optic nerves they tend to have a worse prognosis due to progressive loss of vision, hypothalamic dysfunction and obstructive hydrocephalus. Optic gliomas grow very slowly in a self-limiting manner. The frequency of spontaneous remission of these tumours (also described in patients without neurofibromatosis type 1) is not well recognised. How can a pilocytic astrocytoma completely or partially regress in a few months? The mechanisms behind it are not known. Could these lesions be considered true neoplasms? Also this question seems unresolvable at present, emphasising the need for further investigations. This case confirms the relatively benign behaviour of optic gliomas in such patients affected by neurofibromatosis type 1, supporting conservative management to avoid deficits following aggressive therapy. Serial MRI is recommended in the assessment of the natural history of optic and hypothalamic benign gliomas.

Reference

1. Žižka J, Eliáš P, Jakubec J (2001) Spontaneous regression of low-grade astrocytomas: an underrecognized condition? Eur Radiol http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s003300100946

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