Rhino-Orbitocerebral Zygomycosis Caused by *Conidiobolus incongruus* in an Immunocompromised Patient in Germany

Nicole Wüppenhorst,† Mi-Kyung Lee, Elfriede Rappold, Gian Kayser, Jan Beckevordersandforth, Katja de With, and Annerose Serr

Institute of Medical Microbiology and Hygiene,¹ Department of Hematology and Oncology,² Department of Pathology,³ Department of Neuropathology,⁴ and Division of Infectious Diseases, Department of Medicine,⁵ University Hospital Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

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**CASE REPORT**

A 78-year-old woman with known hypoplastic myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) with trilinear pancytopenia was admitted to our hospital for further evaluation and treatment of refractory fever. Two months earlier she had been diagnosed with hypoplastic MDS without cytogenetic alterations. Because of her good clinical presentation and her age, chemotherapy was not initiated. Other known comorbidities were arterial hypertension and non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus without signs of hyperglycemia. Five weeks before admission, she had developed cellulitis on the right side of the forehead and treatment with cefuroxime intravenously (i.v.) (3 doses of 1.5 g/day) had been initiated, because of an initial swab from which methicillin-sensitive *Staphylococcus aureus* was cultured. At the time of referral, the patient was in a reduced general state of health and she was unable to open the right eye. Hemogram showed leukocyte counts of 700/μl, a hemoglobin level of 6.9 g/dl, thrombocyte counts of 2,000/μl, and a C-reactive protein level of 476 mg/liter. Blood cultures remained sterile. Galactosemia and a hemoglobin level of 6.9 liter), voriconazole (MIC, 32 mg/liter), and caspofungin (MIC, 32 mg/liter) using the Etest method (AB Biodisk, Sweden). A positive result was defined as a sharp break between the control and the test strip. Plates were incubated at 36°C for 24 to 48 h and analyzed according to the instructions of the manufacturer.

In vitro susceptibility testing was performed for trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (MIC, 1 mg/liter), voriconazole (MIC, ≥32 mg/liter), fluconazole (MIC, ≥256 mg/liter), posaconazole (MIC, ≥32 mg/liter), amphotericin B (MIC, ≥32 mg/liter), and caspofungin (MIC, ≥32 mg/liter) using the Etest method (AB Biodisk, Sweden). A suspension of conidia and hyphae (0.5 McFarland standard) was prepared in saline. Amphotericin B was tested on yeast agar (BD), whereas Casitone agar (Bacto Casitone; BD) was used for the other antimicrobials. Plates were incubated at 36°C for 24 to 48 h and analyzed according to the instruc-

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Under 5 days' treatment with liposomal amphotericin B, cellulitis still progressed and now also involved the left eye. In consideration of the unfavorable prognosis of the myelodysplastic syndrome, therapy was stopped and the patient died 9 h later.

From a postmortem biopsy specimen of the right eye, C. incongruus and methicillin-resistant S. aureus were cultured. Calcofluor white staining showed a mass of fluorescent septate hyphae, with infiltration of the vessel wall and beginning infiltration of surrounding brain tissue in the frontal cortex (Grocott stain; magnification, ×200).

FIG. 1. (A) CT scan of the midface: signs of sinusitis (*) and osteolyses of the medial part of the right orbita (→). (Courtesy of Mathias Langer and Marisa Windfuhr-Blum, Department of Radiology, University Hospital of Freiburg; reproduced with permission.) (B) Hyphae with orthogonal branches in periodic acid-Schiff staining (magnification, ×600) in the biopsy specimens of the ethmoidal cells. (C to E) Micromorphology of Conidiobolus incongruus (lactophenol blue; magnification, ×1,000). (C and D) Wide vegetative mycelium with moderate septation. (D and E) Large single-celled primary conidia with pointed papillae. (F) Septate hyphae with orthogonal branches in the calcofluor white staining from the biopsy specimens of the right eye (postmortem; magnification, ×400). (G) Perivascular accumulation of fungal hyphae, with infiltration of the vessel wall and beginning infiltration of surrounding brain tissue in the frontal cortex (Grocott stain; magnification, ×200).
C. incongruus belongs to the subphylum Entomophthoromycotina, order Entomophthorales (6). Infections with Mu
coromycotina (formerly Zygomycota) (6) are considered emerging infectious diseases especially in neutropenic and immunosuppressed patients. In Italy, about 4% of all mold infections in patients with hematologic malignancies are caused by these fungi (10). In these patients the mortality rate is 64% (10). Among the Mucoromycotina, members of the order Mucorales, such as Mucor, Rhizopus, and Rhizomucor spp., are the most common pathogens found in immunosuppressed patients (2, 13). Infections with the Ento-
mophthorales, including the human pathogens C. incongruus and Conidiobolus coronatus, are rare. Conidiobolus spp. are found worldwide in soils and plant detritus. Unlike infec-
tions with the Mucorales, most infections with Conidiobolus spp. have been described in immunocompetent patients, typically men, working in agriculture or in the forest in subtropical and tropical regions (11, 12). Patients suffer from a local chronic, indolent infection involving facial and subcutaneous tissues as well as the paranasal sinuses, lead-
ing to swelling of the infected tissues and chronic sinusitis (12). C. coronatus is the most common species identified. Disseminated infections due to Conidiobolus spp. are ex-
tremely rare (4, 11, 12). One case of a fatal disseminated C. coronatus infection involving brain, lung, heart, renal al-
ograft, and thyroid was reported in a 64-year-old male after renal transplantation. Coinfection with Histoplasma capsula-
tatum and cytomegalovirus was found in this patient (16). Very few invasive infections with C. incongruus have been described in the literature to date. Eckert et al. (3) reported a disseminated infection in a previously healthy 15-month-
old boy with involvement of mediastinum, lung, and peri-
cardium, who survived after treatment with amphotericin B. The first fatal case was described by Busapakum et al. (1) in a 20-year-old previously healthy female Thai student, who presented with a disseminated infection of the skin, medi-
astinum, lung, esophagus, jejunum, and liver. Further fatal cases were reported in a granulocytopenic patient with in-
volvement of lung and pericardium (17) as well as in a 49-year-old female patient with type II diabetes and a sub-
cutaneous C. incongruus infection of the foot (5). A fatal disseminated infection with Conidiobolus species that had not been found previously in vertebrates was described by Jaffey et al. (7) in a 29-year-old cocaine abuser with involve-
ment of the brain, lung, heart, kidneys, and skin.

In patients with suspected mycoses, biopsy specimens of the involved tissues with subsequent histopathological detection of hyphae are essential to establish the diagnosis. With hematoxy-
ylin and eosin (HE) staining, the Splendore-Hoeppli phenom-
emon may be seen (eosinophilic, pseudomycotic structures composed of necrotic debris and immunoglobulins around hy-
phae). As the Splendore-Hoeppli phenomenon is a result of the host’s immune response, it is often missed in immunocom-
promised patients (12), as in our patient. However, it is not specific for Conidiobolus, as it is found in a variety of other fungal infections. In contrast to the Mucorales, Conidiobolus spp. are generally not angioinvasive (11, 12). For species iden-
tification and appropriate choice of therapy, isolation of the fungus from affected tissues should be intended in every case (14). Currently available fungal antigen assays detecting galac-
tomannan or (1–3)-beta-D-glucan in serum samples are not helpful, because they do not cover the Mucorales and Ento-
mophthorales (9).

Experience in treatment of entomophthoramycosis is very limited, and general recommendations are lacking. Results of susceptibility testing may be helpful in guiding therapy but cannot predict outcome. Different schemes containing azoles, amphotericin B, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, potassium iodide, terbinafine, hyperbaric oxygen, and surgical debride-
ment have been used in various combinations with variable success (4, 11, 12).

To our knowledge, this is the first clinical isolate of C. in-
congruus in Germany and hence Europe. Furthermore, this is the first reported case of an invasive disease extending to the brain through neighboring tissues. Due to her comorbidities, our patient was at risk for infections with fungi traditionally named zygomycetes. This case report underlines the relevance of Entomophthorales as opportunistic pathogens. When diag-
nostics rely exclusively on histopathological findings, ento-
mophthoramycosis may be misdiagnosed as mucormycosis. Species identification is indispensable for the collection of suf-
cient data concerning adequate treatment of entomophthora-
mycosis. Especially in patients at risk, rare molds should be taken into account when choosing empirical antymycotic therapy.

Nucleotide sequence accession number. The sequence of our isolate was submitted to GenBank under accession number HQ200416.


5. Hernandez, M. J., W. Landeta, B. N. Salazar, J. Vargas, and A. J. Ro-


