

PATIENTS WITH SELLAR MASSES

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It is a nightmare for endocrinologists to see a patient with a sellar mass that does not look like a pituitary adenoma or craniopharyngioma. It might be anything. Can we seek for help from the neurosurgeons? I am not so sure...

We can summarize the problem under three headings:

1 – How do these patients come to endocrinologist? They rarely come to us directly and are almost referred to us by neurologists, neurosurgeons, gynecologists, ophthalmologists or physicians. The patient usually comes with a CT or MR imaging in her/his hand. Why do these patients seek for help at the place? Most frequently because of headache or visual loss.

2 – Which endocrine tests should we perform? We should never say, “Let us perform all the endocrine tests and see what they are going to hint”. It ends in chaos. We should take a careful history and make a thorough physical examination. Afterwards we can decide on which test and imaging techniques will take us out of darkness. Imaging help us a lot. It has improved beyond my imagination. So far so good. However it does not replace a good clinical judgement.

3 – What are we going to do with the patient now? If the endocrine tests show hypopituitarism, fair enough. We start replacement therapy. However, it does not solve the problem. We have to know what is going on. The most important point is the neurological defects, especially the visual capacity. If it is endangered, what can we do? Can we improve it by medical therapy? If not, the neurosurgeons should step in. But it is we, the endocrinologists, who should decide on the next step.

Endocrinology is a late developer, and it is quite natural that, without the help of laboratory, we are at a loss, and the hormone assays have become available only for the last 20 to 30 years. But we should be careful about interpreting the hormone results.

I have always have a feeling about endocrinology. It has got a touch of phantasy. My colleagues do not like this expression. However, in the last EFES meeting there was a beautiful talk about the future of endocrinology. The pitfalls of endocrinology were mentioned. Believe it or not, one of the comments was this: “Endocrinology is too intellectual”...

Let us enjoy this too intellectual field and see what happens to patients with sellar masses...