ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS IN ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS

BY

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Endocardial fibro-elastosis is a rare finding in infants and young children up to two years of age, and as a rule it leads rapidly to death. Panke and Rottino (1955) found that of 129 cases described 78 per cent had died below the age of twelve months. Its frequency is much less in older children and adults (Smith and Furth, 1943; Hughes and Smith, 1953; White and Fennell, 1954; Thomas et al., 1954; Panke and Rottino, 1955; Popper et al., 1956; and Guraieb and Rigdon, 1956). We have observed five older patients with this disease, three of whom showed the typical clinical picture, while the other two showed features only rarely mentioned in earlier publications.

In endocardial fibro-elastosis the endocardium of one or both ventricles and sometimes also of the atrium is greatly thickened. Usually the left ventricle and left atrium are involved. The endocardium has a greyish-white appearance; it is opaque and reminds one of porcelain. The valves may be somewhat thickened, but generally their function is good. The heart is hypertrophic and its weight is twice or thrice the normal. Mural thrombi have often been found on the abnormal endocardium, and they may give rise to emboli. Microscopically, apart from a connective-tissue-like thickening of the endocardium, an increase of the elastic fibres is observed. As a rule there is a sharp demarcation between the thickened endocardium and the underlying myocardium. Sometimes a few fibrotic foci may be found in the subendocardial myocardium. There are no signs of inflammation or fibrinoid necrosis.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

The signs and symptoms of our patients were very different. As also described in earlier reports, most patients complain of shortness of breath on exertion, but in two of our patients (Cases 2 and 3) bouts of dizziness were of greater importance. Case 2 showed the full Stokes-Adams syndrome, with complete atrioventricular block, in spite of the fact that her age was only 14. Case 3, an 18-year-old girl, had typical angina in addition to the attacks of dizziness. Three of the five patients had palpitation. The fourth had no complaints at all, although the heart considerably increased in size in the course of six years with ultimately sudden death. All patients had enlarged hearts which we have seen increase in size in the course of the observation period (1½ years, 2½ years, 7 years, and 1 year) in four of them. In Cases 2 and 3 mainly the right ventricle was enlarged, in Case 4 the left ventricle, and in Case 5 both the left and right ventricles. The heart had a globular shape (Fig. 1). In Cases 1, 2, and 5 a systolic murmur was audible at the apex of the heart and at the level of the third intercostal space on the sternum. A gallop rhythm was heard in two patients (Case 2 and 3). The cardiogram also showed greater variations (Table I), three patients having conduction disturbances (Case 2 complete atrioventricular block with right bundle-branch block (Fig. 3), Case 4 prolonged atrioventricular interval (0-24 sec.) with left bundle-branch block, and Case 5, left bundle-branch block). Radiologically, Case 3 showed extensive intracardiac calcification (Fig. 2). This calcification has also been found in infants (Jacobs, 1932; Clement et al., 1952). The blood showed in all cases a normal haemoglobin content, normal numbers of erythrocytes and...
leucocytes, and normal distribution of the leucocytes, with no eosinophilia (Table I). The E.S.R. was normal. Reactions for syphilis were negative. In one case the complement-fixation test for toxoplasmosis was applied and appeared negative; the Sabin test was 1:96.

Table II gives the results of cardiac catheterization in three patients. In Cases 1 and 5 this examination was carried out when they already had signs and symptoms of congestive heart failure, so that the pressures in superior vena cava and right atrium were increased, as was also the diastolic
ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS

pressure in the right ventricle in Case 1. A high systolic pressure in the right ventricle and pulmonary artery as far as the periphery suggested left congestive heart failure. In Case 4 the examination was carried out when the patient was still free of complaints; only the systolic pressure in right ventricle and pulmonary artery and also in the periphery of the latter artery was somewhat raised, which already pointed to incipient left congestive heart failure. Among previous reports we found a similar investigation by catheterization only in the paper of Clark et al., (1956) who also noticed a high diastolic pressure in the right ventricle (Table II), while Adams and Katz (1952) catheterized four patients below the age of 2 years, finding an increased systolic pressure in the right ventricle and pulmonary artery in two of them. In Case 4 the pattern of the right ventricular pressure curve suggests constrictive pericarditis. The ratio end-diastolic pressure: systolic pressure was somewhat higher than 1; Clark found an even higher value. This is of importance, because this pattern is therefore not pathognomonic of constrictive pericarditis, as thought by Yu et al. (1953).

We were able to make an angiogram in one patient. The right ventricle was small and filled well, as did the pulmonary artery also. The left ventricle was greatly dilated and emptied slowly, so that no filling of the aorta could be seen after 10 seconds. In this patient the endocardial fibrosis was localized in the left ventricle. The same was found by Prec and Cassels (1952) in an infant.

TABLE I
CLINICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL DATA OF FIVE PATIENTS WITH ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Blood-pressure</th>
<th>Hb.</th>
<th>Red cells (millions cu. mm.)</th>
<th>W.B.C. (per cu. mm.)</th>
<th>Eosinophils</th>
<th>E.C.</th>
<th>Heart-weight</th>
<th>Endocardial fibro-elastosis</th>
<th>Myoc. hyper trophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>115/95</td>
<td>14 g</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>L.V. strain</td>
<td>450 g</td>
<td>L.V.</td>
<td>L.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>110/70</td>
<td>14 g</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>9300</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>A-V block</td>
<td>350 g</td>
<td>L.V.</td>
<td>L.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>135/90</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5-3</td>
<td>7400</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>R.B.B.B.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>L.A., L.V. calcif.</td>
<td>R.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>135/85</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4-3</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>R. vent. hypert.</td>
<td>920 g</td>
<td>L.V., L.A., R.A.</td>
<td>R. and L.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>120/90</td>
<td>14-9 g</td>
<td>4-4</td>
<td>7400</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>L.B.B.B.</td>
<td>800 g</td>
<td>L.V., R.V., L.A.</td>
<td>R. and L.V.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We found the pericardium not raised, although this sometimes observed in infants (Dimond et al., 1955), for the condition was complicated by violent diarrhoea and vomiting and she soon got into a state of

RESULTS OF CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION IN THREE PATIENTS WITH ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Superior vena cava</th>
<th>R. atrium</th>
<th>R. ventricle</th>
<th>Pulmonary artery</th>
<th>Radial artery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O₂ sat. mm. Hg.</td>
<td>O₂ sat. mm. Hg.</td>
<td>O₂ sat. mm. Hg.</td>
<td>O₂ sat. mm. Hg.</td>
<td>O₂ sat. mm. Hg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13 y.</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>26 y.</td>
<td>63-5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>64-5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>46 y.</td>
<td>53-5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>35 y.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39/27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course of the Disease

Older patients, like infants, often die from congestive heart failure (Cases 3 and 5). The course in Case 1 corresponds with that sometimes observed in infants (Dimond et al., 1955), for the condition was complicated by violent diarrhoea and vomiting and she soon got into a state of
shock from which she did not recover. Our Case 2 died from a complete atrioventricular block, eight days after an infection which had reacted well to antibiotic treatment. According to previous observers, the course in our Case 4 was very uncommon; he died suddenly at the age of 26 without ever having had complaints before, although he had a left bundle-branch block and a progressive dilatation of the heart during his last six years of life (Fig. 7).

Sometimes emboli in the systemic circulation may dominate the clinical picture (Popper et al., 1956). These emboli originate from intracardiac mural thrombi.

**Pathology**

The five cases described all showed more or less a connective-tissue-like thickening of the endocardium (Fig. 4). This abnormality is described as endocardial sclerosis or also, in view of the increase of the elastin which is usually found, under the name of endocardial fibro-elastosis. The cases described in this paper also showed this increase of elastin (Fig. 5 and 6); a striking feature was the granular degeneration of the elastin. The sclerosis of the endocardium is usually evenly diffuse. The process is generally localized in the left ventricle, but may be found as well in the other cavities of the heart. Our cases all showed abnormalities of the endocardium of the left ventricle. In Cases 1 and 2 the abnormalities were confined to the left ventricle, while in Cases 3 and 4 the left atrium and the two atria, respectively, were likewise involved in the process; in Case 5, the left ventricle, left atrium, and right ventricle (Table I). Mural thrombosis was demonstrated in one patient. A striking feature is that there are no inflammatory infiltrations, by which the affection can be distinguished from the fibroplastic parietal endocarditis as described by Löffler. In no cases were there indications of myocarditis or myocardial anoxia. Extension of the process to the valves was not found.

Case 2 showed abnormalities in form and arrangement of the papillary muscles; although the chordae tendineae were somewhat heavy and short (Fig. 4), the impression was gained that this was a case of congenital defect. Such defects were also found in Case 1 in the form of absence of the left second rib and the presence of a rudimentary first rib. Case 3 had extensive calcium deposits in the thickened endocardium.

**FIG. 4.—**Case 2. Left ventricle, showing white thickened endocardium and irregular arrangement and abnormal form of the papillary muscles.
**ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS**

Fig. 5.—Case 1. Microphotograph, showing excessive thickening of the endocardium of the left ventricle with increased and crumbling elastin (v. Gieson-elastin; ×160).

Fig. 6.—Case 4. Microphotograph, showing conspicuous thickening of the endocardium of the left ventricle with increase of elastin (Verhoeff; ×100).
The hypertrophy usually observed in these cases may be mild (Case 2) or very advanced (Case 4). In all patients dilated cardiac cavities were found with congestion both in the pulmonary and systemic circulations.

**PATHOLOGICAL PHYSIOLOGY**

Endocardial fibro-elastosis may give rise to a greater or lesser decrease in size of the ventricular cavity, accentuated by mural thrombi. Where there is much decrease in size the ventricular cavity has a smaller capacity and diastole is impeded. When the process is localized in both ventricles, the picture may suggest constrictive pericarditis, the more so because there are only small pulsations of the cardiac border; this is the reason why on several occasions thoracotomy has been carried out in these patients (McKusick and Cochran, 1952; Clark et al., 1956). When only one of the ventricles is involved it is usually the left. In this event pulmonary congestion will develop with much hypertrophic dilatation of the right ventricle and right atrium (Cases 2 and 3). On the other hand, the ventricle with the subendocardial fibro-elastosis may prove to be much dilated (as in our Case 4). Then there is apparently only an impeded systole, so that, in spite of the hypertrophy of the myocardium, the emptying is insufficient. Finally, when the left ventricle is involved, pulmonary congestion will arise. This endocardial process sometimes affects the conducting system, so that Adams-Stokes attacks may occur (Case 2).

The murmurs sometimes heard may be based on co-existing congenital valvular defects (Popper et al., 1956: tricuspid stenosis) or more often on relative insufficiency as a result of the dilatation of the ventricle (Cases 1 and 5).

The fact that congestive heart failure may develop, without severe morphological abnormalities of the myocardium being found may in the first place be explained from this unfavourable influence on the ventricular diastole, or systole. Gross (1941) seeks the cause in a disturbed myocardial circulation, due to the constriction or obliteration of the termination of the Thebesian and other vessels caused by the endocardial fibrosis. Thomas et al. (1954) were able to find a continuation of the fibro-elastic thickening on the sinusoids, but no occlusion by thrombosis. This process may promote the development of myocardial insufficiency.

**AETIOLOGY AND PATHOGENESIS**

Little is known with certainty of the cause of endocardial fibro-elastosis. The morphological changes found in infants and young children show a great resemblance to those seen in older patients.

In young children the clinical picture also is much like that in older children; in particular there is an
ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS

ENLARGED GLOBULAR HEART, SOMETIMES WITH GALLOP RHYTHM OR MURMURS. PROLONGATION OF THE P-R OR QRS INTERVAL HAS SEVERAL TIMES BEEN OBSERVED. INFANTS USUALLY SHOW THE ELECTROCARDIOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF LEFT VENTRICULAR HYPERTROPHY. IN THESE YOUNG PATIENTS, HOWEVER, THE DISEASE USUALLY VERY SOON TAKES A SERIOUS TURN, WITH INCREASED VENOUS PRESSURE, HEPATOMEGALY AND PULMONARY CONGESTION, WHILE THE OLDER PATIENTS IN GENERAL HAVE COMPLAINTS FOR SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE DEATH ENSUES.


THE MURAL THROMBI, REMNANTS OF WHICH ARE OFTEN FOUND ON THE ENDOCARDIUM, ARE USUALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE ORIGINATED SECONDARILY. STILL AND BOULT (1956) OBSERVED BY THE ELECTRON-MICROSCOPE THAT THE FIBRES MOST OFTEN FOUND IN ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS WERE NOT TO BE DISTINGUISHED FROM FIBRIN. THIS MIGHT SUGGEST THAT THE ENDOCARDIAL THICKENING IS CAUSED BY DEPOSITION OF FIBRIN FROM THE BLOOD.


DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

IN THE FIRST PLACE ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS SHOULD BE DIFFERENTIATED FROM THE SO-CALLED ENDOcardial NECROSIS, AS INDICATED BY THOMAS ET AL. (1954) AND OTHER WRITERS. THE CLINICAL PICTURE OF THE LATTER AFFECTION SHOWS A GREAT RESEMBLANCE TO THE FORMER, NOTABLY BY THE OCCURRENCE OF CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE WITHOUT DEMONSTRABLE CAUSE. THE PATHOLOGICAL PICTURE IS QUITE DIFFERENT, HOWEVER: IT IS TRUE THAT IN THESE CASES FOCI OF ENDOCARDIAL THICKENING ARE FOUND, BUT IN ADDITION TO THIS THE ENDOCARDIUM AND MYOCARDIUM ARE DESTROYED AND REPLACED BY VASCULAR FIBROUS TISSUE. ONLY FRAGMENTS OF THE ELASTIC TISSUE ARE TO BE FOUND, IN CONTRAST TO THE INCREASE OF THE ELASTIC FIBRES IN ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS (THOMAS ET AL., 1954), BY VIRTUE OF WHICH THE NAME OF ENDOCARDIAL NECROSIS OR FIBROSIS IS GIVEN TO THIS CONDITION (DAVIES AND BALL, 1955). INFLAMMATORY MANIFESTATIONS HAVE ALSO OFTEN BEEN FOUND. LESIONS OF THE TRicuspid OR MITRAL VALVES MAY BE PRESENT AS WELL, WITH MANIFESTATIONS OF TRICUSPID OR MITRAL INSUFFICIENCY. THE DEGENERATIVE ABNORMALITIES IN THE MYOCARDIUM, LEADING TO FIBROSIS, ARE THE REASON WHY THIS CLINICAL PICTURE IS NAMED MYOCARDITIS FIBROSA. THE HYPERTROPHY
is usually far less marked and may even be absent as in the patients described by Becker et al. (1953). This endomyocardial fibrosis has been found in various clinical pictures.

(i) In the endocarditis parietalis fibroplastica with eosinophilia described by Löffler (1936). The eosinophilia is sometimes only present in certain phases of the disease. The presence of endarteritis and periarteritis is regarded as characteristic for this affection (Weiss-Carmine, 1957; Gerbaux et al., 1956; and van den Brekel, 1956).

(ii) In the patients with manifestations of congestive heart failure observed in Africa by Bedford and Konstam (1946) Davies and Ball (1955), and Becker et al. (1953). Here also eosinophilia has sometimes been found, but this was probably associated with concurrent parasitic diseases. In these cases the manifestations of more general endarteritis and panarteritis are lacking (Weiss-Carmine, 1957). Davies and Ball in several instances found calcium deposits in the endocardium. The cases with only local endocardial fibrosis, as may be observed in myocardial infarctions, do not of course belong to the clinical group of idiopathic endocardial fibro-elastosis.

The diagnosis of endocardial fibro-elastosis should therefore be considered in patients of all ages when progressive cardiac dilatation develops without clear cause, whether or not it is combined with congestive heart failure. Indications suggesting this disease are slight excursions of the cardiac border on radioscopy, conduction disturbances especially at a youthful age, and possibly emboli in the systemic circulation. Pulmonary congestion is the first manifestation to be expected, as the left ventricle is usually involved. In the beginning the pressure values in the right heart may be normal, but, owing to the pulmonary congestion, the pulmonary arteriolar resistance rises, as also the systolic pressure in the right ventricle and pulmonary artery. The configuration of the ventricular pressure curve may be the same as that in constrictive pericarditis (Case 4). Moreover, endocardial fibro-elastosis should be considered if extensive congestion with high venous pressure, large liver, ascites, and œdema develop while the heart is only little enlarged, so that valvular defects, hypertension, and myocardial infarction are ruled out. In these cases one should also think of constrictive pericarditis, amyloidosis of the heart, and endocardial fibrosis. In the differential diagnosis from constrictive pericarditis, a past history, earlier exudative pericarditis, and the presence of calcium deposits in the pericardium may be indications for the last named disease. Atrioventricular or bundle-branch block, if present, are arguments in favour of endocardial fibrosis. The diagnosis of amyloidosis of the heart can be established by means of biopsy of the liver which will also contain amyloid.

Treatment can only be symptomatic; it may be needed for congestive heart failure and arrhythmias. Should emboli occur anticoagulant treatment must be considered, although Hughes and Smith (1953) did not secure any good results from such treatment in their patients.

Summary

The clinical and pathological findings in five patients suffering from endocardial fibro-elastosis are reported. Their ages were 13, 16, 18, 26, and 46 years. Some were observed for several years. A survey is given of the clinical picture, which may show great variations. Usually progressive dilatation of the heart and the manifestations of congestive heart failure are the predominant features. One woman died from Adams-Stokes syndrome and a second died suddenly without ever having had any complaints.

All five patients showed the characteristic abnormalities of the endocardium (thickening of connective tissue with increase of the elastin), intact valves, and as the sole abnormality of the myocardium, hypertrophy. In each case the anomaly was localized in the endocardium of the left ventricle. One patient had extensive calcification of the endocardium. The haemodynamic consequences are discussed.

Little is known of the ætiology and pathogenesis. We think the condition is probably a congenital one.

In the differential diagnosis the following conditions are discussed: constrictive pericarditis and
ENDOCARDIAL FIBRO-ELASTOSIS

amyloidosis of the heart, and the various forms of endomyocardial fibrosis as often observed in Africa, and endocarditis parietalis fibroplastica (Löffler); the two last mentioned diseases show quite a different pathological picture.

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