


Review Article: Managing Brain Tumors in In Vitro Fertilization Pregnancy: Systematic Review

Ramesh Baradaran Bagheri

Assistant Professor of Infertility & IVF, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Alborz, Iran. (Corresponding author / Email: - Orcid: 0000-0002-9853-6799)



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This review addresses some of the issues that doctors encounter when treating a brain tumor in a patient who is pregnant, with a focus on radiation oncology viewpoints. Pregnancy and its effects on cancer survivors are outside the purview of this discussion.

Material and Methods: Using the terms " brain " " tumors" " brain tumors " " pregnancy " "pregnancy-related brain tumors " "pregnancy-related tumors " and " brain tumors in pregnancy " we searched the literature in Pubmed, Cochrane Library, Ovid, and Google for articles in English, Portuguese, and Spanish published in the previous 20 years or older, as appropriate

Results: Since there are no established management guidelines and there are numerous moral and ethical conundrums, the link between brain tumors and pregnancy presents a difficult challenge for the management team. Only small retrospective series of literature are currently available. It is necessary to develop a multidisciplinary plan with individualized management and thorough patient and family counseling at every stage.

Conclusion: This task should only be taken on by large centers with the resources to manage every aspect of therapy related to obstetrics, neonatology, and oncology. The creation of central registries might improve data collection and interpretation to inform future strategies.

Introduction

Fortunately, there isn't much evidence linking brain tumors and pregnancy [1]. An association of this kind released its first report in 1898. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer

Institute Database in the United States reported 31,988 tumors of the central nervous system (CNS) in females of reproductive age (1999–2018, age 20–44 years, population of about 3 billion), with an age-adjusted incidence rate of 5–7 per lakh and an age-adjusted mortality rate of 3–6 per lakh (fig 1).

*Corresponding Author: Ramesh Baradaran Bagheri (R_Baradaran@yahoo.com)

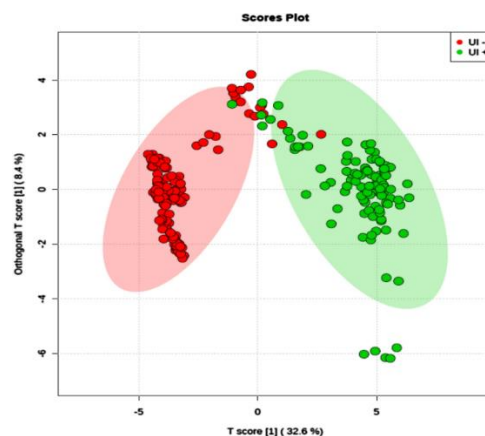


Figure 1: T score results in brain tumor

Simon estimated that there are around 90 pregnant women in the US each year who develop brain tumors, based on probabilistic calculations [2-4]. According to GLOBOCAN 2020, the age-adjusted incidence and mortality rates for CNS tumors in Indian females in the same age group (3514 cases) are estimated to be 1.3 per lakh and 1.0 per lakh, respectively, for the year 2020. This makes CNS tumors the seventh most common cancer and the fifth most common cause of death in this group [5-7].

On pregnancy and brain tumors, there are no published statistics or estimates from India. While some of these women may have brain tumors discovered incidentally while being evaluated for infertility, many of them may go into pregnancy undiagnosed [8-10]. Although the severity of symptoms like seizures and the growth rate seen on imaging may increase during pregnancy, especially in high-grade gliomas, the incidence of brain tumors does not appear to rise during pregnancy compared to the corresponding age-matched population. Despite its rarity, the aforementioned association presents a challenging challenge for the medical team, particularly when it comes to the curative management of the disease without jeopardizing maternal and fetal outcomes [11]. There may be a two-way relationship between brain tumors and pregnancy. During the assessment of infertility, a patient's brain tumor,

which would otherwise be asymptomatic, may be discovered [12-14]. Surgery performed prior to conception will solve both problems if the tumor is determined to be aggressive or to be a factor in infertility. Others may experience seizures, mental health problems, or focal neurological deficits and develop a diagnosis of a de novo or recurrent brain tumor during any trimester of a healthy pregnancy [15-17].

The second scenario involves a patient who is undergoing testing or treatment for a brain tumor who becomes pregnant as a result of ineffective contraception [18-20]. In the latter case, treatment modifications and even abortion should be strongly considered in the event of incidental exposure to the teratogenic effects of drugs, diagnostic or therapeutic radiation, or periods of hypoxia after conception but before confirmation of pregnancy [21-23]. Even though spontaneous abortions are frequent during the first two to three weeks of pregnancy, exposure to chemotherapy typically does not increase the risk of teratogenesis during this time [24-26].

This review addresses some of the issues that doctors encounter when treating a brain tumor in a patient who is pregnant, with a focus on radiation oncology viewpoints. Pregnancy and its effects on cancer survivors are outside the purview of this discussion [27-29].

Materials and Methods

Using the terms " brain " " tumors" " brain tumors " " pregnancy " "pregnancy-related brain tumors " "pregnancy-related tumors " and " brain tumors in pregnancy " we searched the literature in Pubmed, Cochrane Library, Ovid, and Google for articles in English, Portuguese, and Spanish published in the previous 20 years or older, as appropriate.

INTERACTION OF PREGNANCY WITH BRAIN TUMOR ACTIVITY

It is common for women in the reproductive age range to develop benign brain tumors like pituitary adenomas, schwannomas, or meningiomas, as well as malignant tumors like gliomas (Grade 2-4), ependymomas, and very rarely neuroepithelial tumors, chondrosarcomas, lymphomas, or intracranial metastases from systemic malignancies. Pituitary tumors are the most common type of brain tumor in people between the ages of 20 and 44, followed by glial tumors and Grade 1 meningiomas, according to a report from the Central Brain Tumor Registry of the United States based on data from 2014 to 2018.

Females are much more likely than males to develop pituitary tumors and Grade 1 meningiomas. Pituitary and meningeal tumors are both hormone-driven, so during pregnancy, symptoms may worsen. This increases the chance of finding pre-existing, previously asymptomatic lesions. In their thorough analysis

of gliomas and pregnancy, van Westrhenen et al. report on 337 gliomas discovered during pregnancy, 217 of which were newly discovered. According to their series, the proportion of Grade 1, 2, 3, and 4 gliomas was 4 percent, 65 percent, 8 point 6 percent, and 22 point 4 percent, respectively [30-32].

In patients with pre-existing gliomas, pregnancy may cause neurologic symptoms like seizures to worsen, and these symptoms may spark obstetric emergencies. The rise in intracranial tension (ICT) may be linked to gliomas' increased vascularity as a result of hormonal changes. Pregnancy-related hormonal changes may also promote the growth of tumors that are hormone-driven, such as gliomas, meningiomas, acoustic schwannomas, and brain metastases from breast cancer. Furthermore, the immune changes associated with pregnancy may weaken antitumor immunity [33-35].

A pregnancy-related diagnosis of low-grade glioma has no negative effects on survival. In patients with known gliomas, there is a chance of tumor growth (clinically and on imaging), dedifferentiation, and recurrence. It is essential to control secretory pituitary tumors before conception because they frequently result in infertility. Since hyperprolactinemia occurs naturally during pregnancy, disease control in this situation cannot be determined by prolactin levels. There have been reports of the pituitary expanding during pregnancy and involuting after delivery (Fig 2).

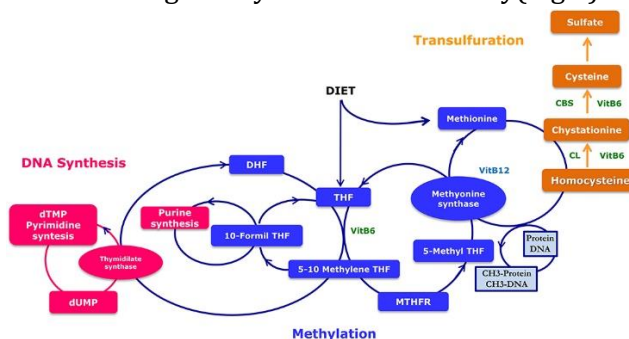


Figure 2: DNA Synthesis in pregnancy

Women with macroadenomas that have never been treated before have the highest risk of

developing symptoms from a tumor growth (18.1%), followed by those who have

microadenomas that have been treated before becoming pregnant (2.5%). Pregnancy may be the time when some patients with large tumors first notice visual symptoms like field defects [36].

EVALUATION OF NEW CENTRAL NERVOUS SYMPTOMS DURING PREGNANCY

Antiepileptic drug (AED) levels in pregnant women who have known epilepsy decrease, but they may return to normal in the postpartum period. In a patient with a planned pregnancy, the doctor and gynecologist should be aware of this risk, and any seizure episode that occurs in this case needs to be evaluated for adequate drug levels of a safe AED [37-39].

To determine if the episode was actually a seizure, doctors should carefully review the medical histories of pregnant women with no prior history of epilepsy who have their first seizure. Aura history and potential seizure triggers like stress and lack of sleep should be investigated. A personality change, focal seizures with secondary generalization, especially in the first trimester, negative symptoms like focal deficits like unilateral motor or sensory loss, and visual field defects are other symptoms that call for early investigation [40-42].

These symptoms are especially concerning if they occur in the second or third trimester, when hyperemesis gravidarum is less common. A thorough workup is required, and the woman should preferably be admitted for self- and fetus-monitoring. Depending on how long a woman has been pregnant, different things could cause her to have seizures [43-45].

In the first trimester, metabolic changes or poisoning, syncope in the second trimester, and preeclampsia or stroke in the third trimester, may result in seizure-like manifestations. In the case of a single seizure episode, AEDs should not be recommended unless the diagnosis has been confirmed. Medication use, toxic agent exposure,

and the possibility of metabolic changes should all be included in a proper history [46-48].

Any concomitant focal neurologic deficits and changes in mental state should be looked for during an examination. In accordance with the results of the clinical evaluation, investigations may also include lumbar puncture, a brain MRI, an electroencephalogram (EEG) or video EEG, and a toxicology screen [49].

Imaging would help identify any potential space-occupying lesion, such as an abscess, tuberculoma, neurocysticercosis, bleed, or brain tumor, after metabolic abnormalities and eclampsia have been ruled out. If a diagnosis of a potential brain tumor is made, consultation with neurosurgeons and oncologists should be sought to determine the best course of management based on symptoms, deficits, the extent and risk of progression of the brain tumor depending on radiologic impression, and the gestational period [50-52].

RISK TO MOTHER AND FOETUS WITH DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

A brain or head-and-neck region computed tomography (CT) scan produces a fetal dose of between 01 and 03 centigrays (cGy). Even though a CT scan for a patient who is aware of being pregnant is not advised, if a CT scan for the purpose of evaluating a brain tumor is accidentally exposed, the need to terminate the pregnancy may need to be taken into account.

The diagnostic yield of brain CT or MRI with intravenous (IV) contrast is significantly increased. Iodinated contrast used in CT scanning may have unfavorable effects on the kidneys and allergies in the general population, but it has not been proven to directly cause birth defects. Neonatal thyroid function testing during the first week of life is advised when their mothers underwent such imaging during pregnancy, based on reports of rare cases of iodinated IV contrast causing hypothyroidism in the fetus [53-55]. MRI contrast is gadolinium-

based, has fewer adverse effects than CT contrast, is less likely to result in an allergic reaction, and has no potential to be nephrotoxic. Although MRI contrast can cross the placenta, no fetal birth defects have been reported [56-58]. Despite these reports, imaging continues to play a contentious role, and whenever a noncontrast MRI is an option and does not compromise a diagnostic study, it should be used to reduce fetal risk. Sometimes technetium 99 m is used for ventilation-perfusion studies in pregnant women with suspected venous

thromboembolism or for brain single-photon emission CT scans. It only emits gamma rays and has a short (6 hours) half-life [59].

The amount of fetal exposure from a single study was less than 0.5 cGy, which is regarded as safe during pregnancy. Contrarily, iodine-131 is not advised for use during pregnancy because of its long (8-day) half-life, ease with which it crosses the placenta, and potential risk to the fetal thyroid when administered after 10–12 weeks of gestation (Fig 3).

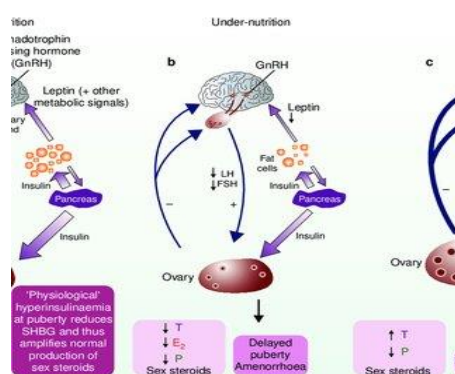


Figure 3: Brain and GnRH in brain

SURGERY/ANESTHESIA

The majority of brain tumors, especially those that are large, high grade, or aggressive, would require surgical resection as the initial treatment option to address the mass effect and establish a histopathologic diagnosis to inform the need for additional treatment [60-62]. The timing of gestation is not a factor in determining whether a craniotomy is required due to expected histology, symptoms, or a mass effect. There have been no reported negative surgical results. In the first trimester, there is a slightly increased risk of miscarriage. Patients with low-grade malignancies or benign diseases may be monitored for progression; if they are asymptomatic and stable, surgery may be delayed until delivery. However, efforts should be made to postpone surgery and delivery until fetal maturity in the early third trimester if stable high-grade gliomas discovered during pregnancy [63-65].

But because of increased ICT, there is a risk to maternal life. Due to the vulnerability of the fetus during the first trimester and the increased risk of intraoperative bleeding during the third trimester, surgery is safer to carry out in the second trimester with the continuation of pregnancy in the presence of moderately controlled symptoms in a brain tumor diagnosed in the first or second trimester [66-68].

In asymptomatic patients, labor induction at 34 weeks may be taken into consideration, followed by brain tumor surgery. It may be possible in some circumstances to perform surgery while receiving IV sedation and local or regional anesthesia without increasing the risk of teratogenesis and with a lower risk of complications with the mother's breathing [69]. Due to the higher risk of neurologic morbidity with a cerebrospinal fluid leak in the latter, general anesthesia (GA) is also acceptable and

regarded as being safer than spinal or epidural anesthesia [70-72].

By allowing the mother to breathe more deeply during tracheal intubation, the ICT is more easily controlled [73-75]. For lesions that are deeply embedded or in close proximity to eloquent regions of the brain, stereotactic biopsy under local anesthesia is a viable option for obtaining a tissue diagnosis. Especially after week 25 of pregnancy, it is advised to involve a maternal-fetal medicine service in the surgical procedure along with intraoperative fetal monitoring [76]. Depending on the location of the tumor as well as the need to maintain vena caval blood flow to lower fetal risk, patient positioning may need to be altered, necessitating a sitting or lateral position rather than a prone position. The postoperative period may also call for intermittent but increased fetal monitoring. Depending on the stage of pregnancy, pain management may involve avoiding medications that could harm the fetus [77-79]. If imaging is required, it is best to use as little ionizing radiation and contrast material as possible [80].

DRUG THERAPY

Pregnant women with brain tumors are advised to take corticosteroids to prevent intracranial edema and advance fetal lung maturity. However, prolonged steroid use has been linked to adrenal insufficiency in the developing fetus, so it is advised to use steroids with caution. Mannitol is not recommended because it could cause fetal dehydration [81-83]. During GA, propofol is regarded as safe and has not been shown to have any negative effects on the fetus. Sevoflurane, desflurane, and isoflurane have been shown to have neurotoxic effects on fetuses and should not be used [84-86].

In order to reduce exposure, anesthesia for all procedures during pregnancy should be administered with the shortest possible duration, the safest dose, and the shortest possible time between induction and the

beginning of the resection. Remifentanyl is the medication of choice for emergency cesarean sections (CS) in patients who have neurologic risk factors due to its opioid properties and quick onset of action. Another anesthetic regarded as pregnancy-safe is dexmedetomidine [87-89]. In between 25 and 30 percent of patients with brain tumors, pregnancy may bring on new seizures or lead to an increase in seizure frequency [90-92].

The lives of the mother and fetus may be in danger due to uncontrolled seizures and status epilepticus, while the newborn may suffer as a result of AED use. Although the use of AEDs during pregnancy is somewhat debatable, they are frequently used to treat patients with cortical brain tumors. AEDs are frequently known teratogens, including phenytoin and valproic acid. All AEDs pass through the placenta, and patients with epilepsy taking AEDs during pregnancy have a slightly higher congenital malformation rate (4-8%) than the general population (2-3%). However, it is generally acknowledged that, in a patient presenting with seizures, the risk of harm from repeated seizures outweighs the potential side effects from AEDs, including potential teratogenicity [93-95].

When there are no symptoms, they are not advised for seizure prevention. The choice of suitable AEDs may be assisted by a neurologist. Lamotrigine, levetiracetam, and carbamazepine monotherapy are the safest and best AEDs, whereas valproate causes developmental delay and is not recommended. Drugs like bromocriptine and dopamine analogs, which may delay or obviate the need for surgical resection in prolactin-secreting pituitary tumors, have acceptable safety profiles with no increase in the risk of spontaneous abortion, preterm labor, multiple births, or congenital malformations [96]. However, they must be used with caution in breastfeeding mothers. Due to the high risk of congenital malformations in

nearly 20% of patients, the European Society of Medical Oncology's clinical practice guidelines on systemic therapy in pregnancy advise against chemotherapy during the first trimester. Consider having the pregnancy terminated if you have a cancer that requires chemotherapy in the first trimester. The majority of chemotherapeutic drugs—but not all—might be safe to use in later trimesters, but each situation's need and risk, no matter how slight, should be carefully considered. Vinblastine is safe even during the first trimester, as are antimetabolites cytarabine and 5-fluorouracil, anthracyclines doxorubicin and epirubicin, vinca alkaloids vinblastine, vincristine, and vinorelbine, taxanes paclitaxel and docetaxel, and platinum agents cisplatin and carboplatin. It is best to steer clear of medications like oxaliplatin, busulfan, idarubicin, and daunorubicin [97]. Due to a lower risk of adverse fetal events, carboplatin should be chosen over cisplatin when treating cancer patients. Methotrexate should not be used during any trimester of pregnancy. Some cytotoxic agents should be given different doses during pregnancy, and there should be room for pharmacokinetic changes as well. If chemotherapy is given during the third trimester, efforts should be made to ensure a 3-week gap before delivery in order to avoid giving birth when blood counts are at their lowest.

Chemotherapy should not be administered past week 33 in order to achieve this goal because it is possible for a woman to give birth prematurely or spontaneously at any time after week 34. If chemotherapy is desired after this gestational period, weekly schedules (doxorubicin, epirubicin, and paclitaxel) may be safer due to lower hematological toxicity and shorter nadir duration. Chemotherapy administered after the first trimester has passed has the potential to result in intrauterine growth retardation, low birth weight, premature birth, stillbirth, myocardial toxicity, impaired

functional development, and myelosuppression. There is no evidence that children exposed to chemotherapy in utero have cognitive, academic, or behavioral impairments. Maggen and associates. have shed light on the transplacental passage of cytotoxic agents, finding that platinum compounds have the highest concentrations (>60%) and taxanes have the lowest (2%). Following exposure to cisplatin, they advise postnatal echocardiography, and after exposure to anthracyclines, postnatal auditory testing.

Conclusion

Since there are no established management guidelines and there are numerous moral and ethical conundrums, the link between brain tumors and pregnancy presents a difficult challenge for the management team. Only small retrospective series of literature are currently available. It is necessary to develop a multidisciplinary plan with individualized management and thorough patient and family counseling at every stage. This task should only be taken on by large centers with the resources to manage every aspect of therapy related to obstetrics, neonatology, and oncology. The creation of central registries might improve data collection and interpretation to inform future strategies.

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