

A Rare Case of Varicella Zoster Meningoencephalitis in an Immunocompetent Host

In the United States, herpes zoster occurs in more than 1.2 million individuals annually, particularly targeting those who are immunocompromised, and can present with many manifestations including encephalitis. Instances of varicella zoster virus (VZV) encephalitis in immunocompetent patients have been rarely reported, but such diagnoses are becoming more frequent as detection of VZV has improved with the adoption of molecular diagnostic panels such as the BioFire Film Array meningitis panel. Here, we present an interesting case of acute meningoencephalitis in an immunocompetent adult female without dermatomal neuralgia or cutaneous lesions only attributable to VZV. Given many inconsistencies between the patient's presentation and the positive PCR result for VZV, we suspected our patient was infected with an undetected organism while possibly simultaneously shedding previously acquired VZV. As molecular diagnostic panels are increasingly used and have greatly improved detection of rarer etiologies of disease, we encourage clinicians to interpret results with caution.