A 44-year-old woman presented with headache and perimesencephalic subarachnoid hemorrhage (PM-SAH). Initial digital subtraction angiography (DSA) and CT angiography (CTA) showed no underlying pathology (Fig. 1A). On Day 9 DSA revealed a 1.7-mm aneurysm of the basilar trunk (Fig. 1B), but CTA on Day 14 failed to demonstrate this aneurysm. The aneurysm was clipped via a subtemporal craniotomy. Postoperative DSA confirmed no residual filling (Fig. 1C), and the patient recovered well.

PM-SAH portends a better prognosis and lower probability of aneurysmal pathology and recurrent hemorrhage than aneurysmal SAH. Aneurysms can be found in PM-SAH but are typically identified on initial DSA or CTA. Some argue that a single angiographic evaluation is sufficient in patients with PM-SAH. Small aneurysms are found in few patients and disappear on follow-up studies, suggesting that identification of the aneurysm may not confer a benefit. This information and concurrent improvements in the sensitivity of CTA have prompted some to consider replacing DSA with CTA in cases of PM-SAH and eliminating repeat studies. Advocates of this approach cite unnecessary risks of DSA and radiation exposure in the setting of a “benign” hemorrhage pattern.

This case illustrates that a negative DSA angiogram does not definitively exclude aneurysmal etiology in PM-SAH. Furthermore, we recommend a conservative approach, utilizing rotational 3D DSA on initial and repeat studies to identify small intracranial aneurysms. This modality remains slightly more sensitive than CTA and conventional DSA at this time. Prospective studies are needed to ascertain whether detection and treatment of these aneurysms confer a benefit.

Perimesencephalic hemorrhage with negative angiography: case illustration

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Fig. 1. A: DS angiogram on admission fails to demonstrate an etiology of SAH. B: Repeat DS angiogram on hospital Day 9 demonstrates a 1.7-mm aneurysm distal to the origin of the anterior inferior cerebellar artery (arrow). C: Postoperative DS angiogram demonstrates no residual filling of the aneurysm.

References

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