Reply: A unique manifestation of primary adrenal insufficiency or a miss after all?

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Dear Editor,

We are grateful for the valuable comments of Dr Windpessl regarding the unusual presentation of adrenal crisis we reported.1 We agree that cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT) is an important differential diagnosis when a young woman on oral contraceptive pill presents with severe headache and neurological deficit and that this indeed could precipitate an adrenal crisis.

However, in the case we reported, it seems extremely unlikely that this diagnosis was missed. Clinically, from the four major symptoms that are frequently associated with CVT: focal neurological abnormalities, isolated raised intracranial hypertension, encephalopathy and seizures,2 only altered mental status was present. Fundoscopy was repeated on several occasions and did not reveal any papilloedema. Moreover, the opening pressure when lumbar puncture was performed was normal (14 cm H2O). During radiological evaluation apart from subarachnoid haemorrhage and pituitary apoplexy, CVT was one of the other clinical entities we aimed to exclude. The second computed tomography of the brain this patient underwent was a contrasted one which specifically commented there was no evidence of CVT. This was then followed by magnetic resonance imaging with contrast which was also reported as normal.

Patient made a remarkable recovery following hydrocortisone administration and once extubated, her Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) was stable and she denied any further headache. Following discharge, she remained well and has not represented with similar symptoms. There were no concerns reported during her follow up visit in the endocrinology clinic either which again goes against the possibility of missed CVT.

The case we reported was full of potential diagnostic pitfalls and a variety of differential diagnoses could have been supported by the presenting history and examination until detailed investigations were performed. For that reason, we decided to share our experience and we are glad it stimulated an interesting discussion. As Sir William Osler once said: ‘Medicine is a science of uncertainty and the art of probability’.3

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References