

Congenital Arteriovenous Malformation of the Scalp Involving the Orbit

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J Neurol Surg A 2018;79:541–549.

Abstract

Background Arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) of the scalp are rare and infrequently encountered by the neurosurgeon.

Case Description We report a unique case of a 42-year-old patient who presented with a progressive worsening of visual acuity in the right eye (lower quadrantanopia) and palpebral ptosis. Physical examination revealed a right exophthalmos and a right frontoparietal scalp soft swelling when the patient was in the supine position. Neurologic work-up showed a scalp AVM extending into the orbit and connected to an intraorbital cavernous angioma. The patient was treated with a frontotemporal craniotomy and decompression of the orbit.

Conclusions In the rare case of intraorbital extension of a scalp AVM, neurologic symptoms may appear when the size of the vascular malformation increases with age. The aims of surgery should be decompression of the orbit and aesthetic preservation, rather than complete excision. A review of the literature is also provided.

Keywords

- ▶ arteriovenous malformation
- ▶ cavernous angioma
- ▶ cirroid aneurysm
- ▶ intraorbital
- ▶ scalp

Introduction

Arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) of the scalp are rare vascular malformations.¹ They are also referred to as cirroid aneurysms because their altered hemodynamics causes a tortuous and progressive dilation of the veins.² Although posttraumatic AVMs have been described, in most patients a clear etiology cannot be established, and the malformations are therefore defined as “congenital” or, in some cases, “idiopathic.”^{3–6} Presenting symptoms include pulsating compressible scalp swelling, headache, local pain, and less commonly hemorrhage and necrosis.^{2,7} However, in the rare case of intraorbital extension, the AVM can cause neurologic and aesthetic impairments that justify an aggressive surgical treatment. We report on a patient with an AVM extending into the orbit and associated with an intraorbital cavernous angioma. We also provide a review of the pertinent literature and discuss the natural history and the management of these uncommon malformations.

Case Report

A 42-year-old male patient presented with a progressive worsening of visual acuity in the right eye (lower quadrantanopia) and palpebral ptosis. In addition, the physical examination revealed right exophthalmos and a right frontoparietal scalp soft swelling when the patient was in the supine position. No birthmarks were noted on the skin. No external ocular movement impairment was detected. Medical history was positive for obesity and hypertension. The right parietal skull appeared thin and discontinuous on computed tomography (CT) (▶ **Fig. 1**, ▶ **Video 1**). Magnetic resonance imaging showed a right intraorbital superolateral vascular malformation (▶ **Video 2**), and digital subtraction angiography revealed the presence of a frontoparietal extracranial pathologic venous malformation fed by vessels from the occipital artery (▶ **Fig. 2**, ▶ **Video 3**). Angiography confirmed the AVM, outlining arterial feeders from the right occipital and temporal arteries, extensive venous dilation on the scalp, and engorged veins in the right orbit.

received

August 17, 2017

accepted after revision

February 8, 2018

published online

June 15, 2018

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Stuttgart · New York

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0038-1641178>
ISSN 2193-6315.

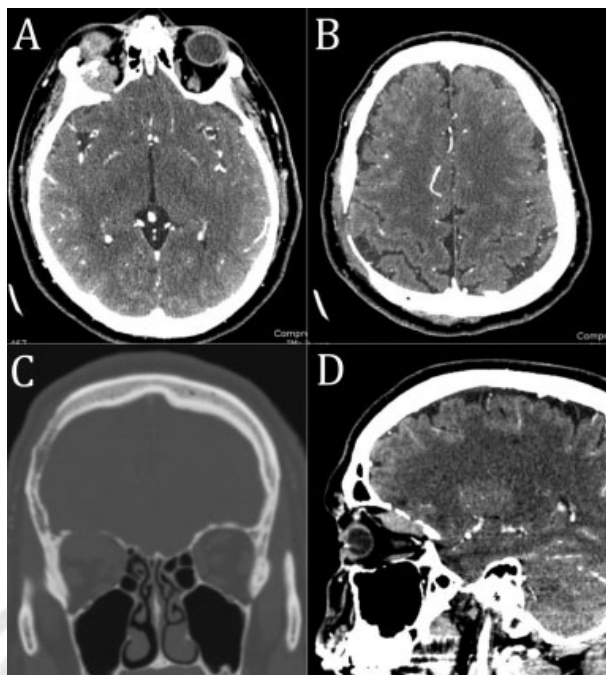


Fig. 1 Preoperative computed tomography scan showing the right intraorbital part of the arteriovenous malformation (AVM), with three small calcifications (a) and the right frontoparietal part of the scalp AVM with skull erosion (b). Coronal (c) and sagittal (d) reconstructions evidence the interruption of the right orbital roof.

Video 1

Preoperative computed tomography angiography. Online content including video sequences viewable at: www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/html/10.1055/s-0038-1641178.

Video 2

Preoperative magnetic resonance imaging. Online content including video sequences viewable at: www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/html/10.1055/s-0038-1641178.

Video 3

Preoperative digital subtraction angiography. Online content including video sequences viewable at: www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/html/10.1055/s-0038-1641178.

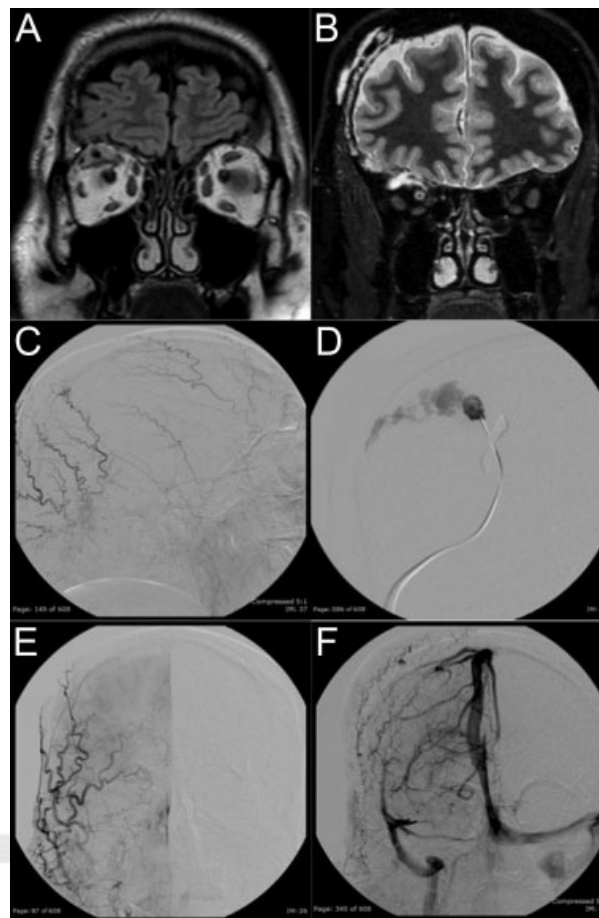


Fig. 2 (a) Coronal fluid attenuation inversion recovery magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) showing the intraorbital part of the arteriovenous malformation (AVM) displacing the superior rectus muscle of the right eye. (b) Coronal short tau inversion recovery MRI showing the connection between the scalp AVM and the intraorbital part of the malformation. (c–f) Angiography demonstrates the feeders of the scalp AVM arising from the occipital artery and, to a lesser extent, from the superficial temporal artery.

The patient underwent a frontotemporal craniotomy. Immediately after the scalp incision, abundant venous bleeding occurred from the AVM that was controlled by cauterization and ligation. The skull below the malformation appeared thin, irregular, discontinuous, and perforated by several thin vessels. No intracranial extension of the malformation was detected. The pathologic features of the bone were also evident on the orbital roof, which was removed. Hemostasis on the pathologic bone was obtained using a diamond drill and bone wax. The intraorbital malformation consisted of very soft venous sinusoids embedded in the orbital fat and tightly attached to the elevator palpebrae and superior rectus muscles. For this reason, we performed just a lesion biopsy, avoiding any attempt of radical removal to prevent further damage to the extrinsic eye muscles. Two spherical calcifications were removed from the intraorbital space. To reconstruct the roof of the orbit, the craniotomy bone was split and the bone piece was properly shaped and fixed to the frontal bone with microplates and microscrews.

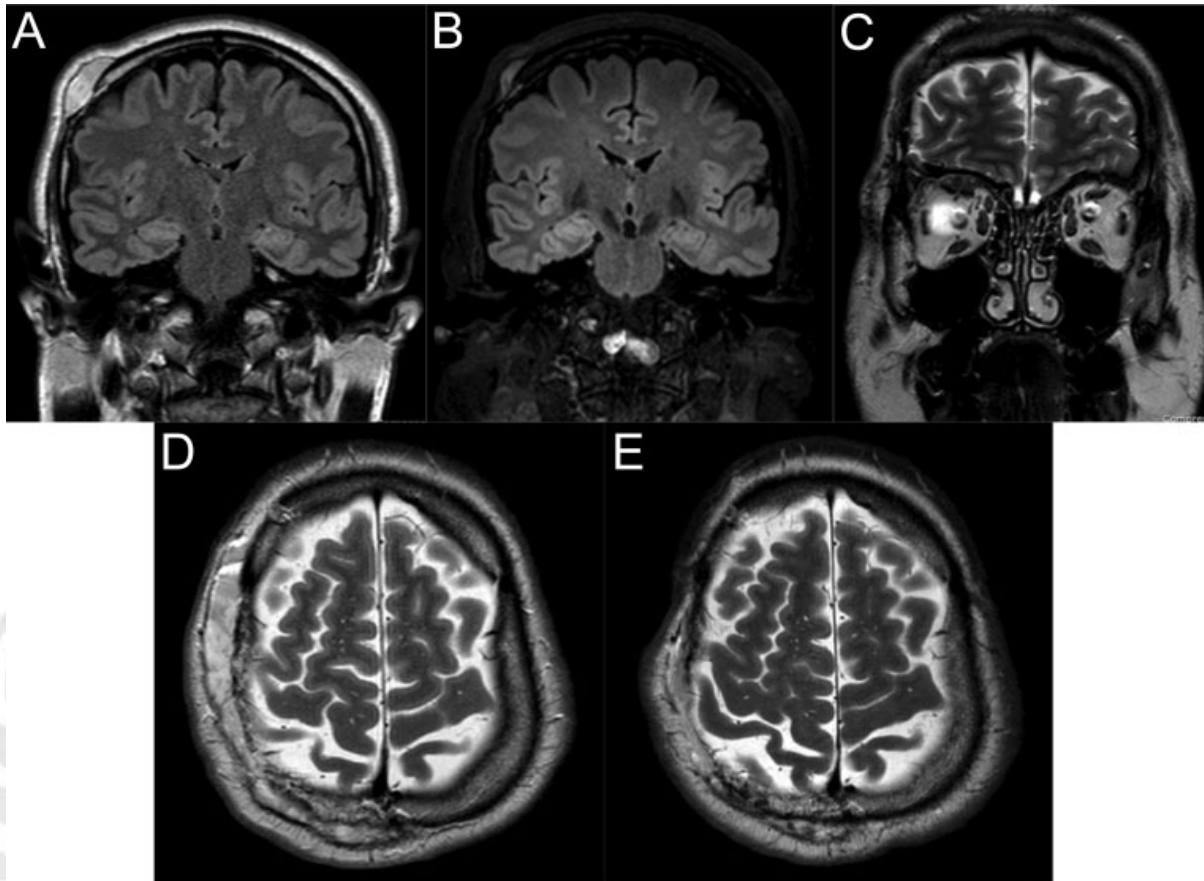


Fig. 3 (a) Preoperative coronal fluid attenuation inversion recovery (FLAIR) magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). (b) Postoperative coronal FLAIR MRI. (c) Postoperative coronal T2-weighted MRI. The volume and extension of the scalp arteriovenous malformation (AVM) is reduced, as well as the intraorbital compression. (d) Preoperative axial T2-weighted MRI. (e) Postoperative axial T2-weighted MRI showing the reduction of the scalp swelling due to the AVM.

The postoperative course was uneventful, and a CT ruled out any complication. Exophthalmos and the soft swelling on the scalp were not evident in the supine position immediately after surgery. The 3-month follow-up neuroradiologic work-up confirmed the satisfactory decompression of the ocular cone, and physical examination revealed a partial progressive recovery of the right palpebral ptosis and a complete resolution of exophthalmos and scalp swelling (► **Fig. 3**, ► **Video 4**).

Video 4

Postoperative magnetic resonance imaging. Online content including video sequences viewable at: www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/html/10.1055/s-0038-1641178.

Discussion

AVMs of the scalp are rare vascular malformations whose origin is still not completely clear.^{2,8} About 10 to 20% of scalp

AVMs develop after penetrating or nonpenetrating head trauma.^{2,3,9} However, according to the vast majority of the published literature, in most cases there is no history of trauma, and the scalp AVMs are therefore defined as either idiopathic or congenital. Some authors distinguish congenital and idiopathic AVMs based on the presence of the malformation since birth.⁵ Nevertheless, it was claimed that congenital scalp AVMs can become evident and clinically relevant only after the second or third decade, making the distinction between congenital and idiopathic extremely difficult.¹⁰ The failure of the embryonic vasculature to differentiate into arteries and veins results in a persistent communication between aberrant vessels, with the absence of an intervening capillary bed.^{8,11} Trauma, pregnancy, and hormonal changes can cause growth of the lesion and worsening of symptoms.¹² A role of vascular endothelial growth factor was also proposed but remains to be confirmed.¹³

Scalp AVMs are also known as arteriovenous aneurysms, cirroid aneurysms, and arteriovenous fistulas.⁴ These lesions are difficult to manage because of their complex vascular anatomy and the extension of the venous dilations in the scalp. They may present with pulsatile swelling, headache, and hemorrhage; neurologic deficits are rare.^{2,7} The altered hemodynamics cause the progressive dilatation of the veins

Table 1 Congenital arteriovenous malformations of the scalp: literature review

| Study | Cases | Age, y/Sex | Location | Size, cm | Presentation | Feeding artery | Treatment |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|----------|----------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Beaumont ¹⁷ | 1 | 22/F | F | | Pulsating mass | | Ligation and surgical electrocautery |
| Elkin ⁹ | 1 | 20/M | T | | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | | Ligation and total excision |
| Oldfield and Addison ³³ | 3 | 34/M | T | | Pulsating mass, swelling | | Total excision |
| | | 17/F | FTP | | Pulsating mass, swelling | STA | Ligation and total excision |
| Vasconez ⁴⁰ | 1 | 51/F | FPO | | Pulsating mass, thrill, headache | | Conservative treatment |
| | | 2/F | Median | 10 × 12 | Large dark eschar | STA, OA | Total excision |
| Stucker ³⁶ | 2 | 59/M | Lateral | | Tinnitus | OA | Ligation and surgical electrocautery |
| | | 53/F | Lateral | | Tinnitus | OA, PAA | Ligation and surgical electrocautery |
| Waga et al ⁴¹ | 2 | 45/M | Lateral | | Pulsating mass | VA | Embolization |
| | | 38/M | Lateral | 10 × 10 | Bleeding | STA, OA | Total excision |
| Mohanty and Rao ²⁸ | 1 | 1.5/F | PTO | 10 × 6 | Pulsating mass, convulsion | STA | Ligation |
| Takahashi et al ³⁷ | 1 | 29/F | T | 10 × 8 | Pulsating mass | IMA, STA | Total excision |
| Yoneda et al ⁴⁴ | 1 | 11/M | Lateral | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Conservative electrocautery |
| Kaufman et al ²⁴ | 2 | 17/F | Lateral | | Bleeding | STA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| | | 4/M | Lateral | | Bleeding | STA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| Schultz And Hermosillo ¹¹ | 1 | 45/F | Lateral | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Ligation and total excision |
| | | 52/M | Median | 8 × 8 | Pulsating mass, bleeding | STA, MMA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| Goya et al ²² | 2 | 17/F | Lateral | 3 × 3 | Pulsating mass, dizziness | OA | Total excision |
| Ohno et al ³² | 1 | 32/M | O | 4 × 7 | Dizziness | OA | Embolization and total excision |
| Irving et al ¹ | 1 | 33/M | Lateral | Large | Pulsating mass, bleeding | STA, SO | Ligation and total excision |
| Konishi et al ²⁵ | 1 | 44/M | O | 4 × 5 | Pulsating mass | OA | Total excision |
| Yamaki et al ⁴³ | 1 | 31/M | T | 5 × 5 | Pulsating mass | DTA | Ligation, embolization and total excision |
| Takahasi et al 1983 | 1 | 22/M | | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA, PAA | Embolization and total excision |
| Shimoda et al ³⁵ | 2 | 25/M | O | 15 × 15 | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Total excision |
| | | 49/M | TP | 1 × 1 | Pulsating mass, tinnitus | STA, OA | Embolization and total excision |

Table 1 (Continued)

| Study | Cases | Age, y/Sex | Location | Size, cm | Presentation | Feeding artery | Treatment |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Komatsu et al ⁸ | 1 | 43/M | F | 4 × 4 | Pulsating mass, bleeding | STA | Total excision |
| Barnwell et al ¹⁴ | 7 | 30/M | P | | | STA | Embolization |
| | | 21/M | P | | | STA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| | | 62/M | P | | Pulsating mass | STA | Embolization |
| | | 62/M | RM | | Bleeding | IMA | Embolization |
| | | 33/M | P | | Headache, swelling | MMA, OA, PAA | Embolization and total excision |
| | | 40/M | Au | | Pulsating mass | STA, PAA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| | | 12/F | Au | | | PAA, OA, IMA | Embolization |
| Mourao et al ¹⁶ | 1 | 50/F | T | | Swelling | STA, OA | Ligation and embolization |
| Worm et al ⁴² | 1 | 33/M | TO | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Excision |
| Nishimura and Kubota ³⁰ | 1 | 47/F | TP | 3 × 3 | Pulsating mass | STA | Ligation and total excision |
| Fisher-Jeffes et al ³ | 13 | | | | | | |
| Kuroki et al ²⁶ | 1 | 23/M | T | 4 × 3 | Tinnitus | STA, OA, PAA, MMA | Total excision |
| Nishiura et al ³¹ | 1 | 27/F | O | 3.5 × 3.5 | Pulsating mass | OA, MMA, pial a | Embolization and total excision |
| Muthukumar et al ⁶ | 5 | 25/M | P | 3 | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | STA, PAA | En bloc resection and repair |
| | | 18/M | O | 4 | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | OA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 30/M | O | 4 | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | OA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 20/M | O | 4 | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | OA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 12/M | O | 9 | Pulsating mass, bruit, thrill | OA, STA | Injection of sclerosing agents twice and total excision |
| Matsushige et al ¹³ | 1 | 21/F | TP | 7 × 7 | Pulsating mass, tinnitus | STA, OA, PAA, MMA, pial artery | Embolization and total excision |
| Shenoy and Raja ³⁴ | 5 | | | | | | |
| Gurkanlar et al ⁴ | 16 | 7/F | P | | Pulsating mass | STA | Subtotal excision |
| | | 21/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 21/M | TP | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 21/M | T | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Embolization and total excision |
| | | 21/M | P | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Total excision |
| | | 22/M | FP | | Pulsating mass | MMA, STA, SO | Total excision |

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

| Study | Cases | Age, y/Sex | Location | Size, cm | Presentation | Feeding artery | Treatment |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|----------|--|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | 20/M | FP | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Total excision |
| | | 22/M | P | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 21/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision and repair |
| | | 28/M | P | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 21/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 23/M | O | | Pulsating mass | OA, PA | Total excision |
| | | 22/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 24/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 20/M | T | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| | | 23/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA | Total excision |
| Mohamed et al ²⁷ | 1 | 30/M | F | | Pulsating mass | STA, OA | Total excision |
| Senoglu et al ⁷ | 1 | 35/M | O | | Pulsating mass, thrill | OA | Ligation |
| Dalyal et al ¹⁵ | 1 | 60/M | O | 4 × 3 | Pulsating mass | OA, PAA | Embolization |
| Hasturk et al ²³ | 1 | 60/M | FT | | Pulsating mass | STA | Excision |
| Kumar et al ² | 2 | ? | PO | 7 × 6 | | OA, PAA | En bloc resection and skin grafting |
| | | ? | F | 10 × 4 | | STA | Embolization and total excision |
| Tauro et al ³⁹ | 1 | 40/F | TO | | Headache, swelling | STA, OA | Conservative treatment |
| El Shazly and Saoud ¹⁹ | 4 | 30/M | P | | Pulsating mass | STA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 32/M | O | | Pulsating mass, headache | OA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 20/M | O | | Pulsating mass | OA, PAA | Total excision |
| | | 25/M | F | | Pulsating mass, headache | SO, STA | Total excision |
| Chowdhury et al ¹⁸ | 6 | 19/M | F | 10 × 5 | Headache, swelling | STA, SO | Total excision |
| | | 43/M | TP | 15 × 19 | Headache, tinnitus, ulceration, bleeding | STA, SO, PA, OA | Total excision |
| | | 18/F | FP | 7 × 18 | Headache, swelling | STA, SO, PAA, ST | Total excision |
| | | 35/M | T | 10 × 12 | Headache, swelling | STA, SO, PA | Total excision |
| | | 39/M | F | 10 × 13 | Headache, swelling | STA, SO, ST | Total excision |
| | | 47/F | T | 7 × 5 | Headache, swelling | STA, SO, PAA | Total excision |
| Goel et al ²¹ | 1 | 16/F | FP | | Pulsating mass, swelling | STA | Ligation and total excision |
| Gupta and Kayal ¹⁰ | 5 | 11/M | FT | 9.4 | Swelling, headache | STA | Excision |

Table 1 (Continued)

| Study | Cases | Age, y/Sex | Location | Size, cm | Presentation | Feeding artery | Treatment |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------------|----------|----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | 12/F | FTP | 18.6 | Swelling, headache, bleeding | STA | Excision |
| | | 17/M | F | 4 | Swelling | STA | Excision |
| | | 14/M | F | 11.2 | Swelling, headache | STA | Excision |
| | | 16/M | O | 3 | Swelling | OA | Excision |
| Munakomi et al ¹² | 1 | 38/F | FTP | 12 × 4 | Swelling | STA, OA, CMA, PCA | |
| Gangadharaswamy et al ²⁰ | 3 | 30/F | T | | Pulsatile mass, headache | ECA | Complete excision |
| | | 50/F | F | | Pulsatile mass, headache | STA | Complete excision |
| | | 12/M | O | | Pulsatile mass | OA | Complete excision |
| Present case | 1 | 42/M | FP | | Swelling, lower quadrantanopia, palpebral ptosis, exophthalmos | OA | Subtotal excision |

Abbreviations: Au, auricular; CMA, callosomarginal artery; ECA, external carotid artery; F, frontal; FP, frontoparietal; FPO, fronto-parieto-occipital; FTP, fronto-temporo-parietal; IMA, internal maxillary artery; MAA, middle meningeal artery; O, occipital; OA, occipital artery; P, parietal; PAA, post auricular artery; PCA, posterior cerebral artery; PO, parieto-occipital; PTO, parieto-temporo-occipital; RM, retromandibular; SO, supraorbital artery; ST, supratrochlear artery; STA, superficial temporal artery; T, temporal; TO, temporo-occipital; TP, temporo-parietal; VA, vertebral artery.

forming so-called cirroid aneurysms.^{2,4} Treatment of these lesions includes endovascular embolization, direct intraleisional injection of sclerosing agents, ligation of feeders, and surgical excision.^{8,13-16}

After a thorough review of the English literature, we found 108 published cases of congenital scalp AVMs (→ Table 1).^{1-4,6-44} The mean age at diagnosis is 27.8, and males are significantly more affected than females in a 2:1 ratio. The most common feeders are the temporal artery (55%) and the occipital artery (40%). Scalp AVMs may be asymptomatic or they can cause symptoms such as pulsation, bleeding, skin erosion, blood steal, and cosmetic problems.^{2,7} Although scalp AVMs can occasionally drain into dural veins, they have only rarely been reported extending intracranially. In some cases, parasitizing arterial vessels from intracranial arteries as internal carotid or posterior cerebral arteries were shown to contribute to feeding of the AVM.¹²

Although ligation, embolization, and injection of sclerosing agents have been used, the most effective and widely adopted treatment is surgical excision.⁷ In only five cases the scalp AVM was not treated and just observed over time. In four of these cases, the patient refused surgery. In one case, reported by Oldfield and Addison in 1962, the scalp AVM was large and connected with an intracranial arteriovenous fistula; the authors considered observation preferable due to the high risks of surgical resection.³³ Final cure after surgical excision is reported in > 90% of operated cases. The observed complications include scalp necrosis (4.5%) and infection (4.5%).

Endovascular transarterial or transvenous embolization has been also performed with good results, as well as intraleisional injection of sclerosing agents, with complete obliteration of the lesion in selected cases.¹⁹ However, these techniques also carry the risk of complications such as skin necrosis, permanent patchy hair loss, pain, skin tenderness, and leakage of embolization material into the systemic circulation.¹⁹ Moreover, embolization alone can be unsuccessful in ~ 10% of cases.³⁵ The combination of preoperative embolization and excision of the scalp AVM has a risk of skin necrosis of ~ 8%. It is worth noting that two deaths were reported after surgical excision, with or without preoperative embolization, due to hypovolemic shock or brain edema.^{2,34}

Treatment of scalp AVMs is required when they cause neurologic symptoms and is generally advisable when they are so large that a direct accidental trauma might cause profuse bleeding. Our case is particularly interesting because the AVM extended through the orbital roof into the orbit, where a cavernous angioma had its venous drainage into the venous part of the AVM. Although cavernous angiomas are the most frequently encountered intraorbital mass lesions, the association between an intraorbital cavernoma and a scalp AVM is exceptional. The orbital roof was thinned and cribriform due to the crossing of several venous connections. A similar pathologic appearance was evident on the frontoparietal skull that was thin and discontinuous. The malformation was completely extradural. Such findings are in accordance with a congenital origin of the malformation.

Notably, despite their congenital origin, the surgeon usually encounters these malformations when the patient is already a

young adult.^{5,6,8} This is not surprising because scalp AVMs may grow and progressively increase both their aesthetic impact and their mass effect on neural, bony, and muscular structures. The lesion growth can be particularly disfiguring and functionally dangerous when it involves the orbit, as shown by our case. The patient did not refer to the physician until the onset of palpebral ptosis and visual impairment. Because our first aim was immediate decompression of the orbit to avoid further neurologic decline, we did not consider embolization, which could be a valid treatment option in cases without neurologic deficit. We initially thought about embolization as a second step to complete the exclusion of the AVM. However, the scalp swelling and venous engorgement completely disappeared after surgery, requiring no further treatment.

This is the second reported case of a scalp AVM extending into the orbit after the one published by Beaumont in 1897,¹⁷ and the first one reporting a scalp AVM anatomically connected to an intraorbital cavernous angioma. Management of scalp AVMs is difficult and challenging because of their high shunt flow, complex anatomy, and cosmetic issues. In general, total resection should be the goal because it offers the only way to radically cure the lesion. However, in cases when neurologic impairment is the onset symptom, and the AVM is complex and directly connected with the orbital compartment, the main aim of surgery should be to avoid further neurologic worsening. For this reason, an effective decompression of the orbit with restoration of cosmesis is indicated, with no need for a hazardous total removal of the malformation.

Conclusions

Scalp AVMs are rare extracranial vascular malformations, seldom encountered by neurosurgeons. Surgical excision is indicated when they cause functional or cosmetic problems. Although they are congenital, their size can progressively increase and bring patients to medical attention when they are already young adults. The rare cases of intraorbital extension of a scalp AVM are particularly threatening because their growth or increase of venous engorgement can produce a mass effect leading to a neurologic deficit like visual acuity impairment and weakness of the ocular muscles. The aim of surgical excision is decompression of the orbit and aesthetic preservation.

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