

BERTOLOTTI'S SYNDROME: AN UNDERDIAGNOSED CAUSE OF LOWER BACK PAIN; CASE REPORT AND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Ling Lee Siang¹,Kerryn-Anne Shalini Shelton²,Seo Soon Teck¹,Sivapathasundaram C. Nadarajah¹

¹Hospital Melaka,²Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia

Introduction: Bertolotti's syndrome is a disorder characterised by lumbosacral transitional vertebra (LSTV) in which the fifth lumbar vertebra transverse process may be enlarged either unilaterally or bilaterally and may articulate or fuse with the ilium or sacrum, thus producing a chronic, persistent lower back pain. The overall incidence has been reported between 4% to 8% in patients with low back pain and 10% in patients with back pain below 30 years old.

Discussion: A 23 years old lady presented with lower back pain for 1 year which worsened in the past 1 week. There was no weakness or numbness. No history of trauma and no bladder or bowel incontinence. Examination findings were normal. Lumbosacral x-ray showed abnormal articulation between the medial aspect of the right ilium and the L5 transverse process consistent with Bertolotti's syndrome. She was treated conservatively and symptoms improved. A similar case was seen in a 43 years old gentleman presented with lower back pain for 5 months which worsened in the past 2 weeks. Examination findings were also normal. Lumbosacral x-ray showed abnormal articulation between the medial aspect of the left ilium and the L5 transverse process consistent with Bertolotti's syndrome. He was also treated conservatively and symptoms improved.

Conclusion: Bertolotti's syndrome is frequently underdiagnosed and should be considered a differential diagnosis for lower back pain in young patients after ruling out all other causes of back pain. Multimodal care is often required for optimal patient outcome. The treatment, whether conservative or operative, is still debated. Therefore, this case report highlights two cases with Bertolotti's syndrome and explains its epidemiology, pathophysiology and management which is an important topic of general knowledge to all doctors.