JOURNAL of RAWALPINDI MEDICAL COLLEGE

Clinical Case Reports

Primary AL Amyloidosis Presenting with Macroglossia and Spontaneous Chest Wall Ecchymosis in a Young Male

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Abstract

Summary: We report the case of a 35-year-old man who presented with progressive macroglossia associated with dysarthria and worsening dyspnoea with no accompanying stridor, dysphagia, or features suggestive of acromegaly; however, the patient specifically reported difficulty pronouncing words starting with the letter "R." Clinical examination revealed evidence of both cardiac and pulmonary involvement. Comprehensive investigations were conducted to rule out alternative causes of macroglossia. An abdominal fat pad biopsy demonstrated Congo red positivity with apple-green birefringence under polarised light, confirming the diagnosis of primary AL amyloidosis.[4] The patient was initiated on chemotherapy, stabilised, and subsequently referred to the oncology department for outpatient follow-up.

Keywords: Immunoglobulin Light-chain Amyloidosis, Macroglossia, Ecchymosis.

Introduction

Primary (AL) amyloidosis is a plasma cell disorder resulting from excessive production of monoclonal light chains that misfold and deposit as insoluble amyloid fibrils in various organs, resulting in progressive organ dysfunction[1] The kidneys, heart, and lungs are the most commonly affected organs[2] Macroglossia, although rare, is considered a pathognomonic clinical feature of AL amyloidosis[3]

Case Presentation

We report the case of a 35-year-old man, Zahid, a chronic smoker, who presented to the Emergency Department with sudden-onset macroglossia, which was progressive in nature, accompanied by spontaneous ecchymotic patches over the anterior chest wall. It was associated with difficulty pronouncing words beginning with the letter "R", Notably, there was no associated stridor, dysphagia, drooling of saliva, or airway compromise. The onset of chest wall ecchymosis occurred simultaneously with tongue enlargement.

The patient also reported progressive exertional dyspnoea corresponding to NYHA Class III, generalised weakness, extreme fatigue, and frothy urine. His medical history was significant for hypertension and a previous diagnosis and surgery for bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. There was no history of trauma, anticoagulant use, or liver disease that could explain the ecchymotic lesions.

On examination, a diffusely enlarged, non-tender tongue occupying the oral cavity without ulceration or restriction of movement was observed. Multiple ecchymotic patches were observed on the anterior chest wall. The cranial nerve examination was normal. The jugular venous pressure was elevated, and bilateral pitting pedal oedema was present. Respiratory examination revealed signs of bilateral pleural effusion. Cardiovascular examination revealed a pansystolic murmur and an audible S3 gallop. Abdominal examination revealed hepatomegaly and ascites. The neurological assessment was unremarkable.

The differential diagnoses considered included primary amyloidosis, acromegaly, congestive cardiac failure, nephrotic syndrome, and hypothyroidism. Baseline laboratory investigations showed 2+ proteinuria, elevated ESR and CRP levels, and hypoalbuminaemia. Brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) levels were elevated, indicating cardiac strain. The serum β2-microglobulin level was elevated. Serum protein electrophoresis revealed a homogeneous monoclonal band in the gamma region, consistent with monoclonal gammopathy, which was further characterised as IgA lambda on immunofixation.

Chest radiography revealed cardiomegaly, and abdominal ultrasonography revealed ascites and a coarse hepatic echotexture. The echocardiographic findings were consistent with those of restrictive cardiomyopathy. An abdominal fat pad biopsy revealed apple-green birefringence under polarised light on Congo red staining, confirming amyloid deposition. A skin biopsy from the right medial scapular region also tested positive for Congo red staining with birefringence.

Bone marrow aspiration revealed an increased number of plasma cells with binucleate forms, suggestive of plasma cell dyscrasia. Bone marrow trephine biopsy showed hypocellular marrow with a predominance of plasma cells and megakaryocytes, indicating bone marrow plasmacytosis.

A final diagnosis of primary systemic (AL-type) amyloidosis with multiorgan involvement secondary to plasma cell dyscrasia was established. The patient was initiated on cyclophosphamide, bortezomib, and Decadron (dexamethasone) as part of the CyBorD chemotherapy regimen, along with supportive therapy, including furosemide, losartan, omeprazole, and prophylactic anticoagulation. He showed initial clinical improvement and was discharged with an oncology follow-up for continuation of therapy.

Discussion

Amyloidosis is a systemic disorder characterised by the extracellular deposition of insoluble misfolded protein fibrils composed of glycosaminoglycans, proteoglycans, and serum amyloid P components.[1]

Contributions:
AM SA MA - Conception, Design
AM SA MA - Acquisition, Analysis, Interpretation
AM SA MA - Drafting
AM SA MA - Critical Review

All authors approved the final version to be published & agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflicts of Interest: None
Financial Support: None to report
Potential Competing Interests: None to report

Institutional Review Board Approval
Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi

Review began 27/10/2025
Review ended 26/01/2026
Published 31/01/2026
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How to cite this article: Masud A, Abid S, Afique M. Primary AL Amyloidosis Presenting with Macroglossia and Spontaneous Chest Wall Ecchymosis in a Young Male. JRMC. 2026 Feb. 14;1(1).

https://doi.org/10.37939/jrmc.v1i1.3087

It is classified according to the biochemical nature of the deposited proteins. Primary light-chain (AL) amyloidosis results from monoclonal immunoglobulin light-chain deposition secondary to clonal plasma cell proliferation.[2] It predominantly affects individuals in the sixth decade of life, with fewer than 10% of cases reported below 50 years of age, and demonstrates a slight male predominance.[3] The kidneys and heart are the most commonly involved organs, presenting with nephrotic-range proteinuria or restrictive cardiomyopathy, respectively.[4] Although macroglossia is considered a classical sign of AL amyloidosis, it is observed in only 10–20% of patients.[5] Spontaneous ecchymosis, particularly over the chest or periorbital region, is even rarer and is attributed to amyloid infiltration of vascular walls, leading to increased capillary fragility.[6] This case is unusual because of its presentation in a 35-year-old man with simultaneous macroglossia and anterior chest wall ecchymosis as the initial manifestations. Differential diagnoses of macroglossia, including acromegaly, hypothyroidism, and neoplastic infiltration, were appropriately excluded through hormonal assays and clinical evaluation. Although the initial tongue biopsy was negative for Congo red staining, elevated beta-2 microglobulin levels on serum protein electrophoresis raised clinical suspicion. Subsequent abdominal fat pad and skin biopsies confirmed amyloid deposition, and bone marrow examination revealed clonal plasma cell infiltration, consistent with AL amyloidosis. The patient was initiated on a bortezomib-based chemotherapy regimen consisting of bortezomib, cyclophosphamide, and dexamethasone (VCD protocol), which is currently recommended as the first-line therapy for transplant-ineligible patients.[7.] Early recognition of atypical mucocutaneous manifestations is essential, as delayed diagnosis significantly worsens the prognosis. This case highlights the importance of maintaining a high index of suspicion for AL amyloidosis, even in younger individuals presenting with isolated physical signs such as macroglossia and unexplained ecchymosis.

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