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NEPHROLOGICAL DISEASES IN FAMILY MEDICINE: PYELONEPHRITIS, GLOMERULONEPHRITIS, CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE AND UROLITHIASIS

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ABSTRACT

Nephrological diseases affect the kidneys and urinary tract and are becoming increasingly common in family medicine. The wide impact of such diseases on general health involves diagnostic and management complexities such as pyelonephritis, glomerulonephritis, CKD, and urolithiasis. Early detection and management of these conditions in the primary care setting improves outcomes significantly. This paper provides an overview of these diseases in family medicine, focusing on their etiology, clinical presentation, diagnosis, and management.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pyelonephritis

General description:

Pyelonephritis is an infection of the kidneys caused by bacteria, usually through an ascending infection of organisms like ***Escherichia coli*** from the lower urinary tract. Pyelonephritis can be either acute or chronic. Its acute presentation may lead to sepsis if left untreated, while chronic presentations carry a risk of scarring and impairment of renal function.

Clinical Presentation:

These patients usually present with complaints of fever, flank pain, nausea, urinary frequency, or urgency. The history of UTIs may be recurring; it is advisable to look for dysuria, hematuria, and pyuria.

Etiology:

Pyelonephritis is, most of the time, caused by a bacterial infection. The most common organism causing pyelonephritis is Escherichia coli, accounting for 70-90% of infections, especially in community-acquired infections. Other pathogens include the following: Proteus, Klebsiella, Enterobacter, and Pseudomonas species. Rarely it may also be produced by fungal or viral infections, particularly among immunocompromised patients. The infection generally declares its presence as a lower urinary tract infection before it ascends to the kidneys.

Risk Factors:

Gender: More women are affected than men due to the shorter urethra, which allows bacteria easier access to the kidneys.

Urinary Tract Obstruction: The obstruction of normal urine flow due to the presence of kidney stones, enlarged prostate in men, or stricture increases the chances of infection.

Vesicoureteral Reflux: An abnormal backward passage of urine from the bladder into the kidneys may be a risk factor for renal bacterial infection.

Frequent Infections: Frequent lower urinary tract infections increase the likelihood of bacterial ascent into the kidneys.

Diabetes mellitus: High blood glucose encourages the growth of bacteria. Diabetic patients may have impaired immune responses.

State of Immunocompromised: That is, conditions like HIV, chemotherapy, or long-term corticosteroid therapy lessen the immunity of a patient against infection.

Urinary Catheter: These are used to increase the risk of introducing bacteria into the urinary tract. The longer the period of catheter use, the greater the risk.

Pregnancy: Hormonal and anatomic changes make them more susceptible to UTI; pyelonephritis can be more serious in pregnant women.

Poor Hydration: Poor fluid intake results in concentrated urine, which may favour the proliferation of bacteria and increase the infection risk.

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Symptoms and Signs:

Flank Pain: Pain may be sharp and is often unilateral or bilateral at the back near the lower ribs.

Fever and Chills: Common in acute pyelonephritis and with high temperatures.

Nausea and Vomiting: Gastrointestinal symptoms are very common in pyelonephritis, especially in serious cases of infections.

Urinary Symptoms: Dysuria or painful urination has often complained of by the patient, and in association with increased frequency and urgency, these symptoms lead to suspicion of a lower urinary tract infection.

Malaise and Fatigue: The patient may feel a generalized sense of illness and generalized fatigue, especially if the infection is beginning to escape the urinary tract.

Cloudy or Foul-Smelling Urine: White blood cells in the urine, also known as pyuria, may cloud the urine and give it an odious smell.

Haematuria: There is bleeding in the urine that may be visible or microscopic in some patients.

Confusion or Delirium: Altered mental states, especially in older patients, can often be a chief symptom of presentation.

Diagnosis:

The diagnosis is essentially clinical, supplemented by urinalysis and urine culture. An elevated WBC count with positive nitrite or leukocyte esterase tests along with the presence of bacteria in urine is indicative. Recurrent cases may need imaging either in the form of ultrasound or a CT scan to rule out structural abnormalities.

Management:

Empiric antibiotic therapy is generally used that cover common pathogens but should be tailored based on culture results. For uncomplicated cases, oral antibiotics would suffice while for the more severe cases, intravenous antibiotics may be needed. Primary care providers should educate their patients on the importance of completing the antibiotic course of treatment and monitoring for recurrent infections.

II. GLOMERULONEPHRITIS

Overview:

Glomerulonephritis is the name given to inflammation of the glomeruli of the kidney and may cause failure of filtration of the kidney. It could be IgA nephropathy and some other variants, primary, or secondary to systemic diseases such as lupus and infections. It may be an acute or a chronic disease.

Clinical Presentation:

Symptoms include hematuria (oftentimes "cola-coloured" in appearance), proteinuria, oedema, and hypertension. In more serious cases, either nephrotic or nephritic syndrome may manifest with heavy proteinuria and loss of renal function.

Etiology:

The etiologies of glomerulonephritis are varied and can be divided into primary or secondary, depending on whether the kidney injury was initiated directly in the kidney or as a result of systemic diseases.

Primary Glomerulonephritis: Primary conditions that attack the kidneys directly. These include IgA Nephropathy (Berger's Disease), Which results from the deposition of IgA antibodies within the glomeruli.

Post-Streptococcal Glomerulonephritis: Usually follows an infection with a particular type of streptococcal infection such as strep throat or impetigo.

Membranous Nephropathy: Results from immune deposits on the glomerular basement membrane.

Minimal Change Disease: The most common cause in children, usually presents with nephrotic syndrome and has very minimal glomerular change when a biopsy is performed.

Glomerulonephritis: Systemic diseases that can be associated with this condition include the following:

Lupus Nephritis: Associated systemic disease: SLE Goodpasture Syndrome: This is an autoimmune disease due to antibodies directed against the basement membrane of the glomeruli and lungs.

Diabetic Nephropathy: It occurs in patients with long-standing, poorly controlled diabetes.

Vasculitis: Inflammation of the blood vessels (for example: granulomatosis with polyangiitis).

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Risk Factors:

Infections: These are streptococcal infections of the throat or skin, which are a well-recognised cause of post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis. Other infections, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV infection, also predispose to this condition.

Autoimmune Disorders: Collagen vascular diseases, such as systemic lupus erythematosus and Goodpasture syndrome, can give rise to secondary glomerulonephritis.

Chronic Diseases: Diabetes and hypertension can put a person at risk, particularly for secondary causes.

Genetic Predisposition: There could be a familial susceptibility or genetic predisposition, as evidenced by a family history of glomerulonephritis or other kidney diseases.

Age: Of these, the post streptococcal glomerulonephritis type is most frequent in children and membranous nephropathy in adults.

Medication: NSAIDs and certain antibiotics are some of the drugs that tend to be associated with the disease.

Toxic Exposure: Chronic exposure to chemicals and toxins in the environment is among the other risk factors for the disease.

Symptoms and Signs:

Hematuria is the presence of blood in the urine, often **"cola-coloured" or tea-coloured** with the presence of red blood cell casts. Proteinuria or the presence of excessive protein in the urine may cause foamy urine and may serve as one of the indicators of renal impairment. This is often manifested by swelling around the face, hands, feet, and abdomen, which is often most marked upon arising in the morning. This is due to fluid retention, as would be evident from the disease process.

Hypertension: Many of them present with high blood pressure, which may be secondary to fluid overload and impaired renal function.

Oliguria: There is reduced urine output, which is most common in acute presentations. Fatigue and

Weakness: A feeling of malaise, tiredness, or weakness might as well arise because of the accumulation of toxins within the body. Headache and Dizziness: Often secondary to hypertension.

Abdominal or Flank Pain: Some patients may complain of discomfort in the abdomen or flank area.

Nausea and Vomiting: Uremia, as manifested by high urea levels, may present with gastrointestinal symptoms, especially in advanced cases or an acute presentation.

Diagnosis:

The urinalysis is very essential and may give one red blood cell casts, proteinuria, and possibly dysmorphic red blood cells. Blood studies may indicate an increase in creatinine and urea due to impairment in the renal function of the kidneys. The other supportive examination is serology to diagnose underlying conditions such as post-infectious glomerulonephritis.

Management:

Management is according to the aetiology and extent of renal impairment. Immunosuppressive therapy may be required in autoimmune causes, but supportive measures, including management of blood pressure and restriction of intake, are needed in all. General practitioners have a crucial part in the monitoring of renal function and the management of hypertension and fluid balance.

III. CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE

Overview:

CKD is characterized by a progressive loss of renal function occurring over months to years. This generally comes secondary to other disorders, such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, or glomerulonephritis. CKD is divided into five stages, based on GFR and albuminuria fifth stage is ESKD, which requires replacement with dialysis or transplant.

Clinical Presentation:

CKD is usually asymptomatic in early stages, and symptoms become apparent with the advancement of the disease. Symptoms may include fatigue, oedema, anaemia, and in advanced disease, uremic symptoms of nausea, pruritus, and changes in cognition.

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Etiology and Risk Factors:

CKD is usually caused by other underlying pathological conditions that cause destructive effects on the kidneys. Causes of CKD include, but are not limited to:

Diabetes Mellitus: This is characterized by a high level of glucose in the blood, which destroyed renal vessels and resulted in diabetic nephropathy, a major cause of CKD.

Hypertension: High blood pressure destroys renal vessels, and it is one of the most common causes of CKD.

Glomerulonephritis: Generally, due to an imbalance of the immune system, this is a chronic inflammation of the glomeruli that may cause progressive damage in the kidneys and CKD. A genetic disorder, polycystic kidney disease involves the formation of cysts in the kidneys, eventually leading to CKD.

Obstructive Uropathy: Conditions that obstruct urine flow-for example, kidney stones or an enlarged prostate can cause urine to back up into the kidneys and build pressure, causing kidney damage.

Vascular Diseases: Conditions that restrict blood flow to the kidneys can lead to ischemic nephropathy. Conditions include atherosclerosis.

Autoimmune Diseases: Diseases, such as lupus nephritis, where the kidneys are attacked by the immune system. Recurring Pyelonephritis: Repeated renal infections result in scarring and lead to chronic destruction of renal tissue.

Risk Factors As age increases, especially beyond the age of **60 years**, so does the likelihood of developing CKD. Family History of Kidney Disease: If there is a history of CKD or any other renal disorders within the family, it will increase the likelihood of developing the condition.

Diabetes: Poorly kept blood glucose dramatically increases the risks of CKD.

Hypertension: It is one of the leading causes of CKD.

Cardiovascular Disease: Heart disease and kidney diseases are interconnected and might be related to each other because of common causative factors.

Obesity: The carrying of excess weight may increase the risk of CKD from high blood pressure and diabetes.

Smoking: It has the effect of damaging the blood vessels that supply blood to the kidneys, hence speeding up the progression of CKD.

Ethnicity: African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have a greater risk for CKD because of a higher incidence of diabetes and hypertension.

Medications: Some drugs act nephrotoxic, particularly NSAIDs with prolonged use.

Signs and Symptoms:

CKD is asymptomatic in its early stages but develops symptoms as the disease progresses:

Fatigue: This is one of the common early symptoms related to the build-up of toxins in the blood and anaemia associated with CKD.

Edema: This is a very common feature, especially in the later stages, with swelling of the ankles, feet, and hands due to fluid retention. Changes in Urination: In patients with renal failure, one may note changes in the frequency of urination or colour or even the consistency of urine. The urine may also be foamy-looking-which can be related to proteinuria or possibly bloody in appearance. Loss of Appetite and Nausea: Waste products tend to accumulate and depress appetite with associated nausea and vomiting.

Muscle Cramps: Many times are caused by imbalances of electrolytes, especially potassium, which can lead to muscle cramping and weakness.

Itching: The buildup of uremic toxins in the skin may cause pruritus and can be very severe in the advanced stages of CKD.

Shortness of Breath: Fluid accumulation and anaemia can eventually cause breathing difficulty, especially in the advanced stages of CKD.

High Blood Pressure: CKD can cause or exacerbate hypertension because of fluid overload and an electrolyte imbalance.

Cognitive Impairment: Later, uremic toxins begin to affect the brain, where mental functions such as confusion or loss of concentration ability are impaired.

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Diagnosis:

CKD is diagnosed based on the estimated glomerular filtration rate and urine albumin-to-creatinine ratio. Persistent proteinuria and a reduced eGFR for more than three months confirm the diagnosis of CKD. Blood pressure, blood glucose, and lipid profiles are useful in the identification of risk factors and comorbid conditions.

Management:

The management mainly stresses the control of underlying diseases such as diabetes and hypertension to stop the progression of the disease. ACEIs or ARBs are usually given to decrease proteinuria and keep blood pressure within normal range. The primary care providers should follow up on kidney function and dietary and lifestyle counselling.

IV. UROLITHIASIS

Overview:

Urolithiasis refers to the formation of kidney stones, which is essentially the crystallization of substances in the urinary tract. The composition of these crystals could include calcium, uric acid, or oxalate. Potential risk factors identified include dehydration, dietary intake of salt or oxalate, and congenital conditions.

Clinical Presentation:

Acute, colicky, intermittent flank pain radiating to the lower abdomen or groin characterizes urolithiasis. Hematuria is common, with nausea and vomiting or urinary symptoms such as frequency or urgency occurring in some patients.

Etiology:

Urolithiasis results from the crystallization of minerals and substances in the urine. Common types of stones include:

Calcium Stones: The most common type, primarily composed of calcium oxalate or calcium phosphate.

Uric Acid Stones: Often form in people with high levels of uric acid in their urine, typically related to a high-protein diet or gout.

Struvite Stones: These form in response to UTIs caused by certain ammonia-producing bacteria.

Cystine Stones: Result from a genetic disorder called cystinuria, wherein the kidneys excrete unusually high levels of cystine. Stones form when urine becomes supersaturated with these substances, which crystallize and aggregate, forming stones.

Risk Factors:

Dehydration: Low intake of fluids concentrates urine, raising the risk of crystal formation.

Diet: The high consumption of oxalate-containing foods-for instance, spinach together with the extreme intake of protein, salt, or sugar, and low calcium intake, is associated with stone formation.

Genetics: A family history increases the chance of kidney stones for some individuals to develop urolithiasis.

Obesity: Obesity results in metabolic alterations, including changes that can encourage the formation of calculi.

Gastrointestinal Disorders: Such disorders include Crohn's disease and surgical alterations of the gastric bypass, conditions which alter absorption and increase the levels of oxalate in the urine. Medical Conditions: Diseases like hyperparathyroidism, renal tubular acidosis, and gout tend to encourage the development of some types of kidney stones.

Certain Medications: Some medications that encourage stone formation include, but are not limited to, diuretics, calcium-based antacids, and some antivirals.

Frequent UTIs: Recurring kidney and bladder infections, especially with organisms that produce urease, can predispose to struvite stones.

Age and Sex: Prevalence of stones is high among the age group of 20-50 years and is more common in males.

Symptoms and Signs:

Severe Flank Pain: A classic symptom, one-sided in the lower back or abdomen and may extend into the groin as the stone moves down the ureter.

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Hematuria: Blood in the urine may give it a pink, red, or brown tint.

Painful Urination: Dysuria, or painful urination, may result when the stones reach the bladder.

Frequency of Urination: The patient may feel a strong urge to urinate, especially when the stone is down, near the bladder.

Nausea and Vomiting: These usually come with severe pain and are the result of the body's reaction to extreme discomfort.

Cloudy or Foul-Smelling Urine: A sign of infection which may accompany stones.

Fever and chills: These can be symptoms of a urinary tract infection that may occur with the stone; obstruction is more likely to present this way.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is by imaging, usually non-contrast CT of the abdomen and pelvis, or ultrasound, particularly in pregnant or young patients. Urinalysis may show haematuria or crystals, and urine pH can be useful to help in stone composition.

Management:

Most small stones pass spontaneously with hydration and pain management. For larger stones, medical expulsive therapy with alpha-blockers may be indicated. Persistent stones will often require urological intervention such as extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy or ureteroscopy. Preventive strategies include dietary adjustments and maintaining adequate hydration.

V. CONCLUSION

Family medicine should be very proactive in screening and early diagnosis of such nephrological diseases as pyelonephritis, glomerulonephritis, CKD, and urolithiasis, providing coordinated care. The role of a family medicine practitioner also involves tasks of teaching and management of risk factors, whereas sometimes intervention requires the assistance of a nephrologist. Early interventions in these disorders reduce complications and help improve the quality of life in patients.

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[13] These references will help provide detailed and accurate information on pyelonephritis, glomerulonephritis, CKD, and urolithiasis for practice in family medicine.