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Peritoneal failure in VP shunts: a clinico-pathological study

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Introduction: Ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunt failure is not uncommon, particularly in young infants. Distal failure refers to failure of the absorptive capacity of the peritoneum. This has often been ascribed to subclinical infection. In this work, we are testing this widely held concept.

Methods: We selected ten infants below one year of age with shunt failure, with evident proximal shunt function. CSF was collected in all of them with shunt tapping, and sent for culture and cell count. A sample of peritoneum was collected during shunt revision and pathologically examined. Infants with evident CSF infection judging by elevated cell count or detection of bacteria on culture were excluded.

Results: In all the ten selected children whose CSF proved to be clean, a constant pathological finding was detected. This consisted in a nonspecific inflammatory reaction in the form of heavy lymphocyte infiltration. No suggestive evidence of pyogenic infection or allergy (Eosinophilic infiltrate) were detected.

Conclusion: Peritoneal failure in infants is not uncommon. A non-infectious, non allergic process is suspected. The causes and nature of this process are not clear. Age plays a major determining factor. This entity is much less commonly encountered in adults, and much commoner in young infants.

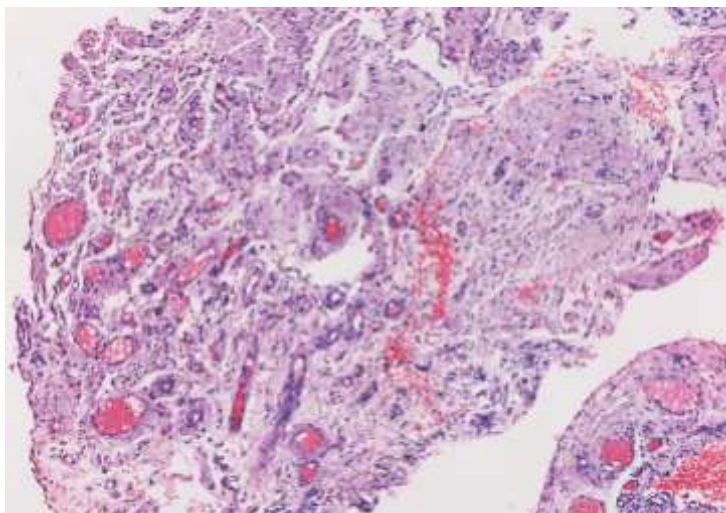


Figure 1: Higher magnification

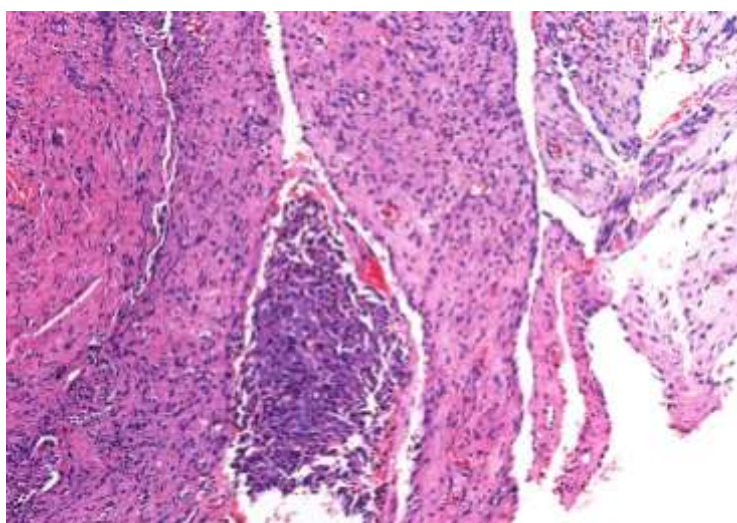


Figure 2: Peritoneum specimen