The acardiac twin: a case report

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The acardiac twin or twin reversed arterial perfusion sequence (TRAPS) represents one of the most severe, but rare, congenital anomalies which occurs only in multiple gestations associated with vascular anastomoses between the affected fetus and its co-twin. We report an interesting case of a macrosomic acardiac fetus weighing 3.5 fold of another donor fetus. A 20-year-old Thai woman, gravida 1, para 0 was referred to Chulalongkorn Hospital at 19 weeks' gestation for further management of twin with one fetal demise due to absence of identifiable cardiac pulsation. Ultrasound scan confirmed a diamniotic twin gestation. The anatomy of Twin A appeared normal, but the upper part of the body of Twin B was markedly distorted. Cystic hygroma, ascites and marked tissue edema were noted. No definable cardiac pulsation was demonstrated. A twin with one fetal hydrops, associated with acardiac fetus, was suspected. Bed rest was recommended, and follow-up sonographic examinations documented progressive discrepancy of BPD. At 31 weeks' gestation, hydramnios and preterm labor were presented despite labor inhibition with salbutamol. The infants were delivered by low transverse cesarean section because of transverse-oblique line. The male acardiac twin weighing 4,200 g., demonstrated no cardiac activity but showed a huge cephalic part with imperfect face and omphalocele. The normal male twin weighed 1,210 gm., with Apgar scores of 8 and 9 at 1 and 5 minutes, respectively, but died of pneumonia and sepsis at age 7 days. Examination of the placenta demonstrated interfetal vascular anastomosis. The mother's postoperative course was unremarkable.

Key words: Acardiac twin, Twin reverse arterial perfusion sequence (TRAPS).

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Received for publication. September 1, 1994.

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การตั้งครรภ์แต่โครกแรกโดยทั่วไปไม่มีหัวใจ จัดเป็นภาวะที่พบน้อยมาก แต่มีความรุนแรงก็เกิดในภาวะที่คล้ายคลึงกันมีการหัวใจรบกวนในระยะแรก ช่วงแรก 3-5 เดือน หลักตามปกติ มวลหัวใจถึง 20 ปี ตั้งครรภ์แรก ได้รับการผลักดันให้รักษาในโรงพยาบาลจุฬาลงกรณ์เมื่อครรภ์ 19 สัปดาห์ด้วยพบว่าเป็น
ครรภ์แท้และสมัยที่มีการเลือกเชื้อนั้น เนื่องจากการตรวจไม่พบการตั้งครรภ์ของหัวใจแท้พบ
ครรภ์ครั้งสุดท้าย ได้ทำการตรวจสอบความมีหัวใจ พบว่าเป็นการตั้งครรภ์แท้ที่มีน้ำเท่ากับ
2 ถุง ทำให้แน่ใจว่าจะไม่พบความมีหัวใจ แต่ทำให้ครรภ์แท้ถูกน้ำไปตามความรุนแรง
มีความยากมาก โดยมีอายุนับจากใหญ่ร้อยศิริมงคลและมีภาวะท้องท้อง ปรับทำตัวและไม่ได้น้ำเท่ามี
ให้การตรวจใช้เป็นการเฉพาะมีหัวใจและมีภาวะท้องท้อง แนะนำให้ทำการตั้งครรภ์ในโรงพยาบาล
โดยให้คลาุมคลอง แล้วตรวจดังความที่มีความสูงขนาดศิริมงคลของท้องท้องมี
ความแตกต่างกันมาก เมื่ออายุครรภ์ 31 สัปดาห์ ภาวะครรภ์นั้นมีความรุนแรงมากและทำให้
เจ้าครรภ์ท้องกินร่างรวม เมื่อให้ยาคลาุมคลองมีผลกัน ทำให้ครรภ์ได้รับการดูแลครรภ์
ที่คลาุมคลอง  Nhưngกล้ามท้องของท้องท้องในครรภ์น้ำเท่ากับ 4,200 กรัม เนื่องจากมีศิริมงคล
ระหว่างการตั้งครรภ์ขนาดใหญ่ ใช้ต่อไปนั้นพบวิธี และมี omphalocele ร่วมด้วย ทำให้ครรภ์แท้
ครรภ์นั้นมีน้ำเท่ากับ น้ำแท้ 1,210 กรัม มีคะแนนแอปการ์ที่ 1 และ 5 น้ำแท้ทำกับ 6 และ 9
ตามลำดับ แต่เสียชีวิตในเวลาต่อมาเนื่องจากปัญหา และปัญหาเมื่ออายุ 7 วันหลังคลอด
การตรวจพบการตั้งครรภ์ของหัวใจแท้ หลังคลอดครั้งที่ 1 ไม่มีภาวะแท้งขอย
Acardiac malformation, characterised by failure of heart development and severe dysmorphogenesis, is a rare consequence of monozygotic twinning.\(^{1}\) The incidence of this phenomenon is 1 per 35,000 deliveries,\(^{2}\) with 1% of all monozygotic twins affected.\(^{3}\) The condition has also been reported to occur in non induced pregnant triplet pregnancies with a higher incidence.\(^{4,5}\) The acardiac monster represents one of the most severe congenital anomalies so prenatal diagnosis of an acardiac fetus must be suspected in any multiple gestation in which cardiac activity cannot be demonstrated sonographically in a growing fetus. We report an interesting case of a macromesom acardiac fetus weighing 3.5-fold the other variable donor fetus.

**Case Report**

A 20-year-old Thai woman, gravida 1, para 0, had her last menstrual period on August 1\(^{\text{st}}\), 1992, and an estimated date of confinement of May 8\(^{\text{th}}\), 1993. A uterine size-date discrepancy became apparent at 16 weeks' gestation. The obstetric ultrasound scan on November 25\(^{\text{th}}\), 1992, revealed a twin gestation. An intrauterine fetal demise was suspected due to the absence of identifiable cardiac pulsation in the smaller twin with a biparietal diameter (BPD) of 30 mm. The viable twin had a BPD of 36 mm., which was compatible with the menstrual age.

The patient was referred to Chulalongkorn Hospital for further evaluation and management. The ultrasound scan repeated on December 17\(^{\text{th}}\), 1992, by Hitachi EUB40 at 19 weeks' gestation confirmed a diarnniotic twin gestation.

The anatomy of Twin A appeared normal, despite a mild increase in the amniotic fluid volume. However, there were marked tissue edema and abnormally large multi-cystic areas around the head and upper part of the body of Twin B compatible with cystic hygroma. The chest was represented by a large soloneluent area with no definable cardiac pulsation. Ascites were noted. Both kidneys were not demonstrated. The fetal bladder seen. The upper extremities were poorly identified. The lower extremities showed marked edema of the skin and subcutaneous tissues. (Figure 1) The umbilical cord of each twin was noted to contain three vessels. Bed rest was recommended, and follow-up sonographic examinations at 4 week intervals were performed at 24 weeks' gestation to assess the growth of the viable twin. The authors, the BPD of Twin A (viable twin) had grown from 47.0 to 60.2 mm., whereas Twin B had markedly grown from 43.0 to 68.2 mm., without cardiac pulsation. The diagnosis was twins pregnancy with an acardiac fetus. At 28 weeks' gestation, the patient was hospitalised because of a weight gain of 5 kg in a 2-week period, acute hydramnios, and uterine irritability. Her blood pressure was 130/80 mmHg and regular uterine contractions were noted. Labor inhibition with oral salbutamol of 32 mg. per day was initiated; and with success in a few hours later. Continuation of oral salbutamol was recommended. At 31 weeks' gestation, the patient complained marked abdominal distention and was in labor despite the presence of tocolytics. Fundal height was 42 cm and pelvic examination revealed cervix was 6 cm dilated, and completely effaced. The infants were delivered by low transverse cesarean section because of transverse-oblique line of twin A and dystocia due to the huge upper part of the acardiac twin B.
The patient's postoperative course was uneventful.

Discussion

Based on the associated anomalies, four types of acardiac twins are described in the literature: acardius aniceps, acardius acephalus, acardius acormus, and acardius amorphus. The clinician must be aware that classification may be difficult in certain cases. The most highly developed type, acardius aniceps, has a partly developed head and a deformed face, trunk, and extremities, and is exortic.

The etiology of the acardiac twin remains unknown. Two main theoretical etiologies have been proposed. The first explanation is based on a chromosomal defect causing primary cardiac agenesis or dysgenesis in the acardiac twin, which is then perfused by the healthy twin through the anastomosis. The second theory (vascular reversal theory), abnormal placental vascular communications between the twins as the primary factor, resulting in secondary atrophy or arrest of cardiac and other tissue development in one twin. In the acardiac twin the anastomoses have classically been described as artery to artery and vein to vein, which differs from the twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, where the anastomosis is artery to vein. The pressure of blood from the heart of the first (normal) twin forces the current backwards through the arteries of the second (acardiac) twin. Since normal morphogenesis of the cardiac tube depends on the magnitude and direction of hemodynamic forces, the heart of the second twin atrophies. The hemodynamically disadvantaged twin, known as the perfused twin, will depend on "used" blood from the normal twin, known as the pump twin. Such inadequate
Perfusion with poorly oxygenated blood is the main cause of the various forms of tissue disruption and incomplete morphogenesis in the perfused twin. There are strong evidence in favour of the vascular reversal perfusion theory. Recently, Doppler blood flow studies have further substantiated the vascular theory.\(^{8,10}\)

**Diagram 1** Pathophysiological development of the twin reversed arterial perfusion sequence.

Obstetric ultrasonography has made prenatal diagnosis of the acardiac twin possible. The hallmark for the diagnosis of an acardiac twin by ultrasound is the absence of identifiable cardiac pulsation. Other characteristic features are ill defined head, trunk and upper extremities. The lower extremities are usually present but often deformed. There are usually marked tissue edema and multiple cystic areas in the upper part of the body. Other associated features are two-vessel cord and hydramnios in the acardiac twin sac. Recently the use of Doppler sonography has enabled the demonstration of circulation reversal with arterial blood flow towards the acardiac twin\(^{8,10,11}\) but this case doppler sonography was not done because of limitation of instrument used.

Once the diagnosis of the acardiac twin is made, the therapeutic interest is focused on the normal twin since the monster has no chance of survival. Mortality rates for the normal twin are as high as 50 percent\(^9\) with the cause of death for congestive heart failure and extreme prematurity due to hydramnios and preterm labor. The aims of management are to prevent, detect and possibly treat congestive heart failure in the normal twin and continue pregnancy to term. When twin reversal arterial perfusion (TRAP) is diagnosed, close fetal surveillance should be employed. Hydrops due to congestive heart failure in the normal twin can be treated with digoxin given to the mother. If there is a threat of preterm labor and the normal fetus is not
compromised, tocolytic agents should be administered, with steroids. Serial amniocenteses are needed for symptomatic hydramnios. During labour, the delivery of the acardiac twin is usually associated with significant soft tissue dystocia of the upper part of abnormal twin due to multiple structural anomalies or hydrops.

Platt et al. proposed severing the anastomotic circulation by clamping the umbilical cord of the acardiac fetus. Robie et al. described hysterotomy with selective delivery of the acardiac fetus at 22 weeks' gestation and subsequent delivery of the healthy surviving fetus at 33 weeks. Porreco et al. used a thrombogenic coil to interrupt vascular flow to the acardiac fetus with delivery of the healthy twin at 39 weeks.

References