Favipiravir-Induced Nephrotoxicity in a Patient with COVID-19: a case report

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Words Count: 1636

Abstract

This report describes a case of 45 years old male patient who tested positive for COVID-19 presented to the emergency department on March 2021 complaining of fever, cough, runny nose, and shortness of breath. The patient denied any history of nausea or diarrhea who has eventually developed favipiravir-induced nephrotoxicity.

Keywords: Favipiravir, Acute Kidney Injury, COVID-19, Nephrotoxicity

Key Clinical Message

Favipiravir should be used with caution in patients with established CKD stages II and III and IV, daily kidney functions monitoring while on treatment may be required to ensure safe and effective use.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 (caused by SARS-COV-2) has rapidly spread worldwide through close human interactions or the spilled respirational material (cough, sneeze) of the infected people resulting in a pandemic throughout China, as well as other countries throughout the world [1].

Acute kidney injury (AKI) is prevalent among patients admitted with SARS-COV-2 infections [2]. Many published studies had addressed this issue as poor clinical outcomes and prognosis accompany it. The mechanism and pathophysiology of renal involvement in SARS-COV-2 infection are unclear. Still, some published literature are justifying it by having COVID-19 related causes such as direct injury to the kidney tissue from the entry of the virus through the receptor angiotensin-converting enzyme ACE2, which is highly expressed in the kidney or non-COVID specific mechanisms like hypovolemia, hemodynamic instability, or sometimes nephrotoxic medications [3-5].

Favipiravir is an orally administered antiviral nucleotide analog [6]. It inhibits RNA polymerase, which targets both viral shedding and loads with subsequent reduction in mortality and intubation in patients affected with COVID-19 [7]. It is one of the primary medications that have been used in the treatment protocol of confirmed COVID-19 mild to moderate pneumonia cases in the state of Qatar.

Generally, favipiravir is well tolerated with a good safety profile, and the main reported ADRs are GIT side effects and elevation in both ALT and AST [6]. Favipiravir did not show a nephrotoxic effect on animal studies. Favipiravir is actively excreted through the renal route, and its serum concentration are expected to increase by 2-3 folds in patients with eGFR of 30 to 50 ml/min however, data is lacking and insufficient about the need for renal dosing calculation or adjustment [8]. Clinical trials are excluding patients with severe renal impairment. Favipiravir had shown efficacy in treating COVID-19 pneumonia on some ESRD patients who are maintained on Hemodialysis [9]. The drug data basis and monographs are only recommending general caution about worsening renal parameters and kidney functions; however, they lack data about adequate dose adjustments based on current kidney or liver functions.

CASE PRESENTATION

TA is 45 years old male obese patient (Body Mass Index (BMI)=35) known case of hypertension (HTN) for more than 10 years controlled on amlodipine 10mg daily, chronic kidney disease (CKD) with a history of proteinuria (Baseline Srcr 177 Mmol/l with calculated Clcr=51 ml/min) Old CVA (Left Basal Ganglia ICH 2016 with right hemiparesis maintained on baclofen 10mg TID), presented to the emergency department on 13/03/2021 complaining of fever, cough, runny nose and shortness of breath. The patient denied any history of nausea or diarrhea.

He has positive COVID-19 PCR with an average CT=29, Temp=37, a Chest x-ray showed mild infiltrates on Lt side blood results on admission are shown on (Table 1).

The patient was started on COVID-19 Medication as per our protocol، favipiravir 1600mg bid received on 14/03/2021 then 600mg bid for total 7 days (received only one day 15/03/2021), ceftriaxone 2gm IV daily for 7 days, dexamethasone 8mg IV daily for 10 days.

We found the patient to have an abrupt elevation on his Src from the baseline admission by 2.7 folds approximately 48 hours after starting Favipiravir reaching 489µmol/l with accepted urine output 1.3-1.5L (see Figure 1), nephrologist was consulted who had ordered for Ultrasound Kidneys, Ureters and bladder (USG KUB) which showed normal size bilateral kidneys with evidence of chronic parenchymal medical disease as well as autoimmune workup (C3, C4, ANA, anti-GBM) which all came negative to rule out autoimmune kidney disease. Serum creatinine and renal parameters showed trending down after stopping favipiravir until reaching baseline of 169 Mmol/l with adequate renal output also, the patient showed features of resolving respiratory failure; trending down inflammatory markers and successful oxygen weaning off.

The AKI improved within 12-24 hours after favipiravir discontinuation, demonstrating a timely association of favipiravir and the abrupt elevation of renal parameters (nephrotoxicity).

DISCUSSION

Drug-induced nephrotoxicity is defined by "the presence of any kidney injury caused directly or indirectly by medication"[10]. It is common among hospitalized patients, the third main cause of AKI, and anti-infectives had been shown to be one of the most common drug classes associated with it [11].

Favipiravir had been widely used as an effective antiviral for the management of COVID-19 pneumonia since it was declared as a pandemic last December 2019. Favipiravir had shown better therapeutic responses on COVID-19 pneumonia in terms of disease progression and viral clearance [12]. In another randomized, controlled, open-label multicenter trial, favipiravir was found to significantly improve the latency to relief for pneumonia symptoms like pyrexia and cough [13].

According to Nasa and colleagues [14], there was a case report published early this year of two COVID-19 pneumonia male patients (38 and 51 years old) with normal kidney functions at baseline who had developed non-oliguric AKI approximately 48hours after receiving Favipiravir -on the same dose which had been mentioned above-which had improved 24-48 hours after stopping Favipiravir and this to a certain extent coincident with the above-mentioned findings of our patient apart from that our patient is a known case of CKD

CONCLUSION

The health care professional need to be very careful of any new adverse events with all the medications used to treat COVID-19 pneumonia as enough evidence from the literature does not support them. The AKI needs a comprehensive review for all possible underlying etiologies and causes before correlating it to COVID-19.

Abbreviations

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease

PCR: Polymerase chain reaction

AKI: Acute Kidney injury

ICH: Intracranial Hemorrhage

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The article describes a case report. Therefore, no additional permission from our Ethics Committee was required.

Consent for publication

The consent for publication was obtained.

Availability of data and material

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Conflict of interest

All the authors have declared no competing interest.

Funding

This study was not funded.

Authors' contributions

AAA, AEA, AJN: Data Collection, Literature Search, Manuscript Preparation

All authors read and approved the final manuscript

Acknowledgments

Open Access funding provided by the Qatar National Library.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Laboratory results on admission

Figure 1. Urea and Creatinine values