



Visual Case Discussion

Middle-aged healthy woman with painful ear and asymmetrical smile

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1. Discussion

This patient was diagnosed with Ramsay Hunt Syndrome (RHS), a rare complication of varicella-zoster virus (VZV) reactivation at the geniculate ganglion,¹ which can lead to peripheral facial nerve palsy, hearing loss, and vestibular problems.² It classically presents with vesicular rash in the external auditory canal (herpes zoster oticus) and is associated with acute peripheral facial nerve palsy.¹ Although the paralysis is generally more severe and prognosis poorer than simple Bell's Palsy, prompt diagnosis and initiation of steroids and antiviral therapy can lead to complete resolution of facial nerve palsy in up to 75% of cases.³ Guidelines for optimal treatment dosing and duration are unclear but the addition of antiviral agents to steroids have been shown to improve outcomes when compared to steroids alone.³

Our patient was discharged home with Valacyclovir × 7 days, Prednisone × 5 days, and Percocet × 3 days. She had ENT follow up with improvement in dizziness, nausea, and pain. She developed asymmetric left sided hearing loss with no change in the facial nerve paralysis, which ENT will continue to follow.

2. Visual case discussion

A 61-year-old previous healthy female presented to the emergency department (ED) with left ear pain (1-week duration) and left facial weakness. Two days prior to presentation, she was diagnosed with otitis media/externa at an urgent care facility and prescribed PO Ciprofloxacin and Ciprodex otic drops. At presentation, she had nausea and vertigo, worsening left ear pain with bloody purulent discharge (Fig. 1), and newly developed left sided facial weakness (Figs. 2 and 3).

3. Question

- 1 *Question Text* Ramsay Hunt Syndrome leads to a peripheral facial nerve palsy which is typically less severe than in simple Bell's Palsy and with prompt therapy can resolve completely in 50% of cases.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 2 *Question Text* The recommended treatment for Ramsay Hunt Syndrome includes:
 - a) Only antiviral agents
 - b) Only steroids
 - c) Antiviral agents and steroids
 - d) Antiviral agents, steroids, and otic antibiotic drops
 - e) No treatment necessary

4. Answer

- 1 Correct Answer = =b) False; Although the paralysis is generally more severe and prognosis poorer than simple Bell's Palsy, prompt diagnosis and initiation of steroids and antiviral therapy can lead to complete resolution of facial nerve palsy in up to 75% of cases.
- 2 Correct Answer = =c) Antiviral agents and steroids; Guidelines for optimal treatment dosing and duration are unclear but the addition of antiviral agents to steroids have been shown to improve outcomes when compared to steroids alone.

Declaration of Competing Interest

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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Fig. 1. Swollen left ear with purulent discharge. Vesicles in external canal present. TM unable to be visualized.



Fig. 2. Patient unable to lift left eyebrow.



Fig. 3. Patient with asymmetrical smile.

the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.visj.2019.100667](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.visj.2019.100667).

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Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in