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Cyanotic patients require specific follow-up

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A 34-year-old cyanotic woman (oxygen saturation, 79%) with pulmonary atresia, perimembranous outlet nonrestrictive ventricular septal defect, patent ductus arteriosus, and major aortopulmonary collaterals (MAPCAS) (Figure 1A–D) was first-time admitted to the outpatient clinic for adults with congenital heart defects. On admission blood tests were performed (hemoglobin, 15g/dl; hematocrit, 49%; ferritin, 2.3 ng/ml; transferrin saturation, 7.6%). She was disqualified from the surgical correction in childhood due to a complete pulmonary blood supply from MAPCAS. At the age of 32 years, she suffered from right-sided hemiparesis and aphasia. Diagnostics performed at that time showed abnormal levels of hematocrit (53.1%) and hemoglobin (17.2 g/dl); a head computed tomography (CT) scan depicted ischemia of left-sided lentiform and caudate nucleus (42 × 22 × 22 mm size) and hyperdense M2 segment of a left middle cerebral artery. The diagnosis of ischemic stroke was made. Due to the unknown time of symptoms onset, fibrinolysis was not administered. Angiography of the left carotid artery showed obstructions of left-sided middle and anterior cerebral arteries managed with mechanical thrombectomy (Penumbra system). In the follow-up, she fully recovered. Since then, the patient has been managed with enoxaparin and aspirin. One year later, she was hospitalized due to fever and constant headache for seven days. On admission, a head CT depicted a hypodense area in the left frontal lobe with a hyperdense ring (25 × 20 × 19 mm size) and surrounding tissue edema. A brain abscess was diagnosed, and amoxicillin with clavulanic acid was initiated. The patient was transferred to the

neurosurgical ward, and pharmacotherapy was changed to vancomycin, ceftriaxone, and metronidazole. The abscess was confirmed in magnetic resonance imaging and neurosurgically removed (Figure 1E). The microbiological examination did not reveal any pathogen. Ultrasound examination of lower extremity veins showed a thrombus in the right posterior tibial and popliteal veins, and anticoagulation was changed from aspirin and enoxaparin to rivaroxaban. Knowing the risk of thromboembolic complications due to relative anemia and the results from the patient's blood tests on admission, we decided to administer oral Ferrum therapy.

Cyanotic patients are amenable to cerebral injury, i.e., ischemic stroke or brain abscess formation [1]. The main reasons for ischemic stroke are hyperviscosity syndrome and iron deficiency. Reduced oxygen saturation triggers secondary erythrocytosis, the lower the oxygen saturation, the higher the hematocrit level as a result of adaptation [2]. In routine blood work, it is essential to check for iron deficiency, as it is the main prognostic factor in this population. Right-to-left shunting bypassing pulmonary circulation enables bacteria direct flow to cerebral vessels [1]. Also, hypoxemia, causing tissue hypoxia creates a suitable environment for brain abscess formation [3]. The episode of new headaches in cyanotic patients requires comprehensive assessment and treatment. Head imaging is the first step in the diagnostic process. Cephalosporine, meropenem, or metronidazole should be initiated without delay as recommended empirical therapy for brain abscess [4]. Surgical intervention is required if the abscess exceeds 1cm in diameter [4]. Our patient was treated both pharmacologically and surgically, and she fully recovered. Avoiding infections with proper oral hygiene is critical to prevent future life-threatening events [5].

Article information

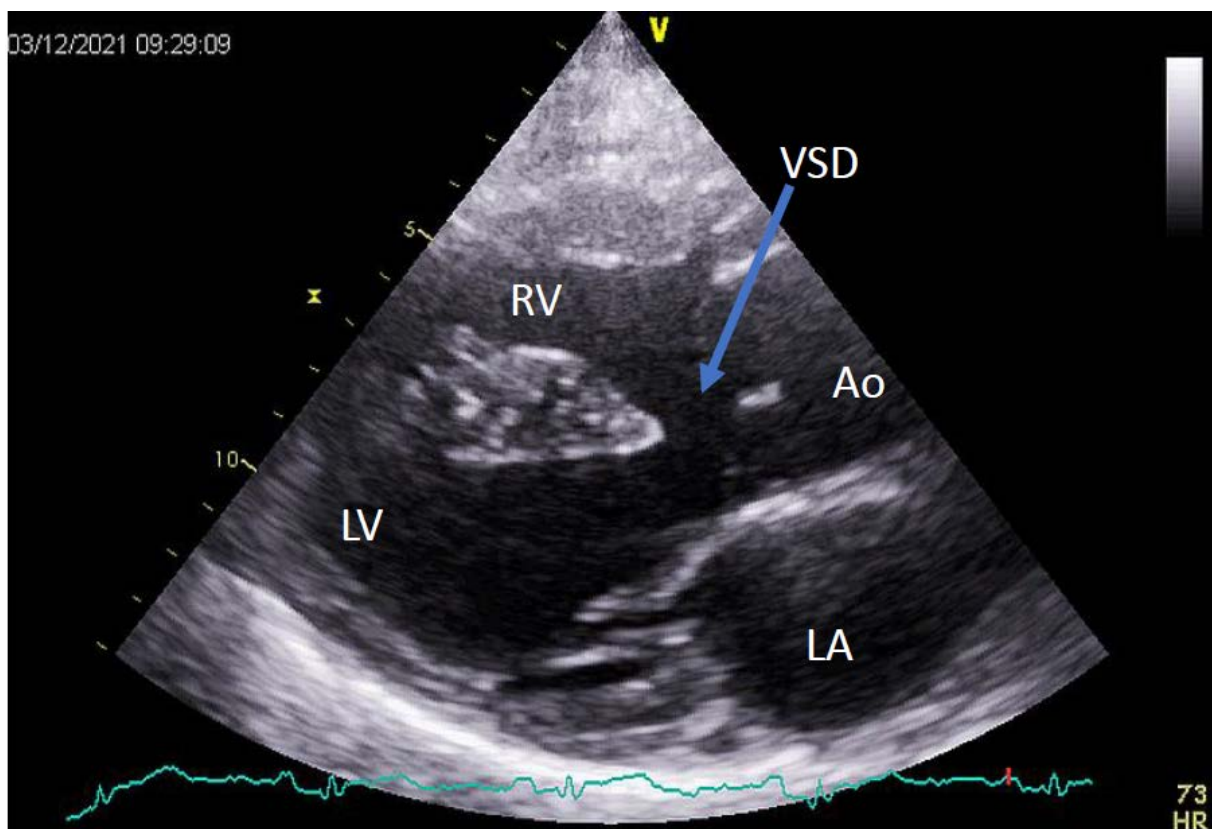
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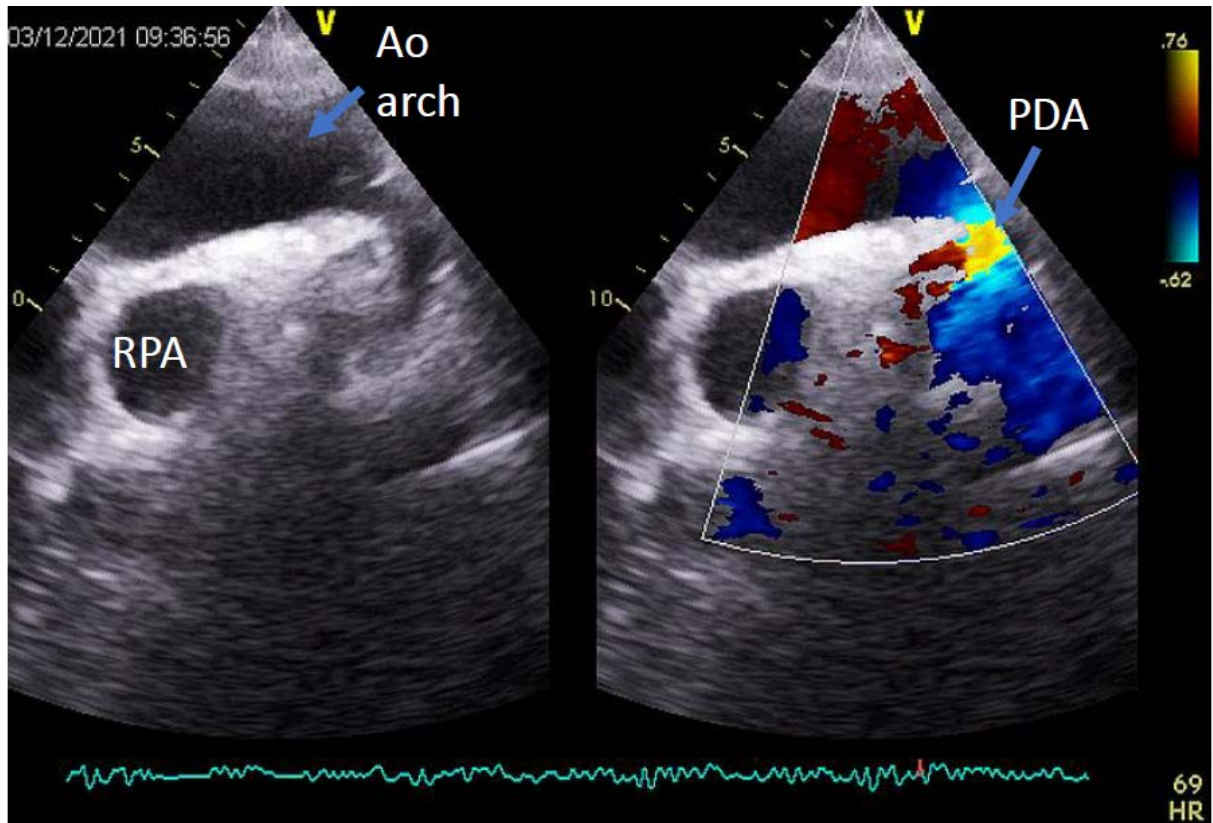
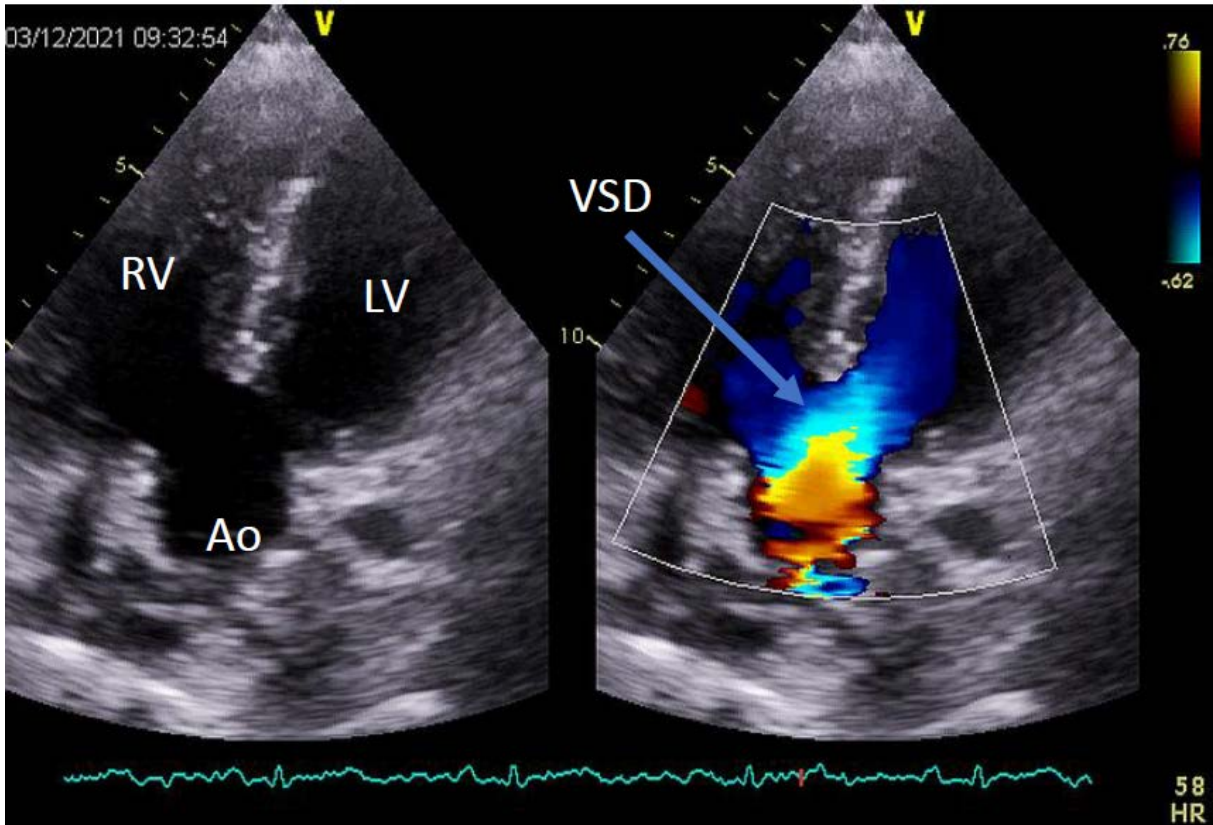
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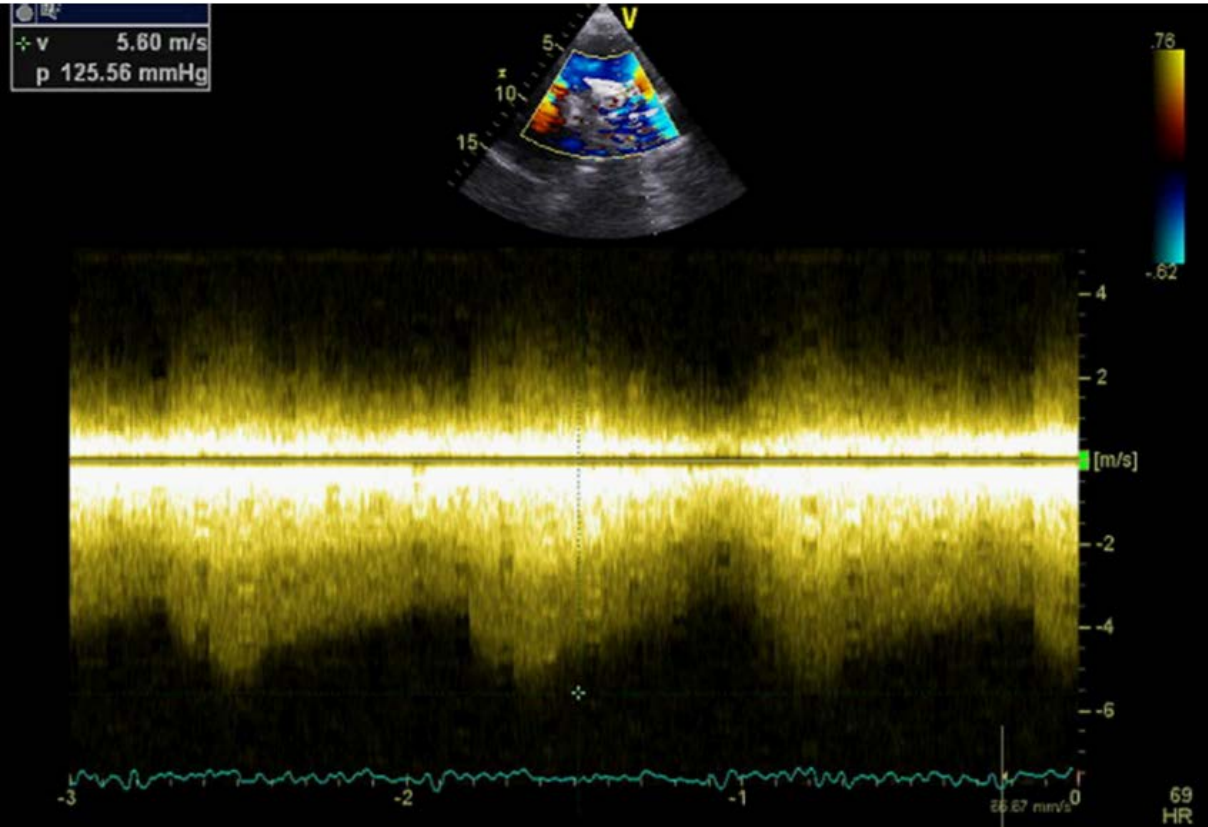




Figure 1. **A.** Transthoracic echocardiographic examination, parasternal long axis view, nonrestrictive perimembranous ventricular septal defect with bidirectional shunt. **B.** Transthoracic echocardiographic examination, five-chamber view, nonrestrictive perimembranous ventricular septal defect with bidirectional shunt. **C.** Transthoracic examination, suprasternal notch view, patent ductus arteriosus. **D.** Transthoracic examination, suprasternal notch view, continuous doppler flow through patent ductus arteriosus. **E.** Magnetic resonance examination of the brain, coronal plane, site of the abscess indicated with arrow

Abbreviations: Ao, aorta; Ao arch, aortic arch; LA, left atrium; LV, left ventricle; PDA, patent ductus arteriosus; RPA, right pulmonary artery; RV, right ventricle; VSD, ventricular septal defect