A severe case of pneumopathy in a duck breeder due to Chlamydia psittaci diagnosed by 16S rDNA sequencing

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Carlier, L. [1], Kempf, Marie [2], Aaziz, R. [3], Jolivet-Gougeon, A. [4], Laroucau, K. [5]

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Introduction: Psittacosis is a zoonotic infectious disease contracted from birds and caused by Chlamydia psittaci, an obligate intracellular pathogen. In humans, the symptoms of the disease range from inapparent illness to systemic illness with severe pneumonia.

Case presentation: A severe case of atypical pneumonia requiring extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation in a duck breeder is described. Because of the critical urgency of the case described here, and without any clear identification of the pathogen during the first days of hospitalization, treatment had to be adjusted daily. While conventional clinical methods failed to identify the causative agent, C. psittaci was finally identified using broad-range 16S rDNA PCR analysis performed on a sample of broncho-alveolar fluid.

Conclusion: Owing to the non-specific clinical signs of psittacosis, early identification of cases of the disease remains a challenge. C. psittaci should be sought in patients presenting severe acute respiratory distress syndrome without any evidence of other infectious causes and especially when exposure to birds or bird products is reported. PCR is a very useful method to help identify fastidious organisms of this kind.

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