

Ethambutol Optic Neuropathy with Favorable Visual Outcome

Paul B. Griggs, MD (Seattle, WA), Richard C. Lee, BS (Seattle, WA)

PURPOSE

To discuss the clinical presentation and management of optic neuropathy associated with systemic ethambutol administration.

METHODS

Two patients presented with progressive binocular vision loss following the initiation of systemic ethambutol therapy. A complete ophthalmic evaluation was performed. Therapy was adjusted based on the results of this evaluation.

RESULTS

The initial evaluation revealed the presence of a binocular symptomatic reduction in central visual function and color vision. The past medical history was significant for documented *Mycobacterium avium* complex disease in both patients for which ethambutol therapy had been initiated. With the exception of possible glaucomatous optic neuropathy in one eye of one patient, no other specific optic nerve or macular abnormalities were observed. The ethambutol was discontinued in both patients, and a gradual improvement in visual acuity and color vision was observed in both over a period of several months.

CONCLUSION

Ethambutol optic neuropathy is uncommon in clinical practice. A high degree of clinical suspicion is important in recognizing its occurrence. The earliest findings include loss of visual acuity and color vision with or without a central scotoma. Objective clinical findings may not be present on initial presentation. Recovery may occur following ethambutol discontinuation over a variable time frame.