DEFINITION

1. **Syringomyelia** is a chronic disorder of the spinal cord and the brain-stem. It is characterized by the presence of elongated cavities together with overgrowth of the adjacent glial cells.

2. There are two types of syringomyelia –

   2.1 **Communicating syringomyelia**, this being the commoner variety.

   2.2 **Non-communicating syringomyelia**.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

3. The condition usually develops insidiously. In rare cases, there is rapid development over a period of a few weeks.

4. The condition is more common in males than females and symptoms may appear at any age between 10 and 60 years, most commonly between 25 and 40 years of age.

5. The most constant and characteristic feature is loss of appreciation of pain, heat and cold over the area of the body served by the particular part of the spinal cord involved.

6. There may be muscle weakness and wasting, again appearing in those parts of the body served by the portion of the spinal cord involved.

AETIOLOGY

Communicating syringomyelia

7. These cases occur in individuals with congenital abnormalities of the brain and spinal cord, there being, in particular, a communication between the fourth ventricle of the brain (one of the cavities within the brain) and the spinal canal.

8. The generally held view is that the cavity probably begins to form before birth and, as a result of pressure effects in the cerebro-spinal fluid (caused by congenital abnormalities which prevent free flow of the fluid), begins to expand in later years.

Non-communicating syringomyelia

9. These cases are more often due to or associated with spinal injury (with or without paraplegia), spinal arachnoiditis or spinal tumour.

CONCLUSION

10. Syringomyelia is a disorder of the spinal cord and the brain-stem which is characterized by the formation of cavities within the cord tissue. The condition may be congenital or acquired.

REFERENCES

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