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Unmasking Bartonella henselae: A forgotten cause of hepatosplenic and marrow involvement

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Abstract

Bartonella henselae is an uncommon but important cause of prolonged pyrexia of unknown origin (PUO) and hepatosplenomegaly. Conventional diagnostic tools often fail in disseminated disease, leading to delayed or missed diagnoses. We report a 60-year-old man with PUO, progressive weight loss, and hepatosplenomegaly. Clinical suspicion, guided by significant cat exposure, led to molecular confirmation of *B. henselae* infection after conventional workup proved inconclusive. Liver biopsy revealed pleomorphic rod-shaped organisms on Warthin-Starry staining, while real-time PCR targeting the *rpoB* gene and conventional PCR targeting the *gltA* gene performed on bone marrow aspirate confirmed disseminated bartonellosis. The patient responded well to prolonged doxycycline and rifampicin therapy, achieving near-complete recovery. This case underscores the importance of clinical vigilance, histological clues, and molecular diagnostics in identifying rare but treatable infections. © 2026, Malaysian Society for Parasitology. All rights reserved.

Author keywords

bacillary peliosis; *Bartonella henselae*; cats; hepatosplenomegaly; pyrexia of unknown origin

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