



# First Report of Bilateral External Auditory Canal Cochlin Aggregates (“Cochlinomas”) with Multifocal Amyloid-Like Deposits, Associated with Sensorineural Hearing Loss and a Novel Genetic Variant in COCH Encoding Cochlin

DOI:

[10.1007/s12105-019-01073-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12105-019-01073-7)

## Document Version

Accepted author manuscript

[Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer](#)

## Citation for published version (APA):

Basu, A., Boczek, N. J., Robertson, N. G., Nasr, S. H., Jethanamest, D., Mcphail, E. D., Kurtin, P. J., Dasari, S., Butz, M., Morton, C. C., Highsmith, W. E., & Zhou, F. (2020). First Report of Bilateral External Auditory Canal Cochlin Aggregates (“Cochlinomas”) with Multifocal Amyloid-Like Deposits, Associated with Sensorineural Hearing Loss and a Novel Genetic Variant in COCH Encoding Cochlin. *Head and Neck Pathology*, 14(3), 808-816. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12105-019-01073-7>

## Published in:

Head and Neck Pathology

## Citing this paper

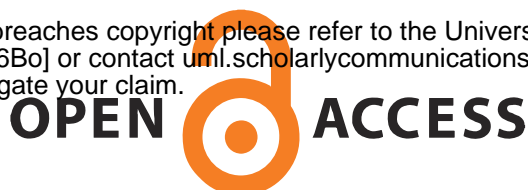
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

## Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester's Takedown Procedures [<http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo>] or contact [uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk) providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.



1 **Title page**

2

3 Title: First report of bilateral external auditory canal cochlin aggregates (“cochlinomas”) with  
4 multifocal amyloid-like deposits, associated with sensorineural hearing loss and a novel genetic  
5 variant in *COCH* encoding cochlin

6

7 Running head: Amyloid-like cochlin deposits in EACs

8

9 Precis: We present the first case of deafness associated with bilateral external auditory canal  
10 cochlin deposits, evidence suggestive of cochlin-derived amyloid formation, and a novel *COCH*  
11 variant. Our findings reveal a new pathologic manifestation of cochlin and highlight the  
12 importance of thoroughly investigating all aggregative tissue findings in the practice of diagnostic  
13 pathology.

14

15 Authors:

- 16 1. Atreyee Basu, MD (Department of Pathology, NYU) [atreyee.basu@nyumc.org](mailto:atreyee.basu@nyumc.org)
- 17 2. Nicole J. Boczek, PhD (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic,  
18 Rochester, MN) [Boczek.Nicole@mayo.edu](mailto:Boczek.Nicole@mayo.edu)
- 19 3. Nahid G. Robertson, PhD (Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Brigham and  
20 Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA) [nrobertson@research.bwh.harvard.edu](mailto:nrobertson@research.bwh.harvard.edu)
- 21 4. Samih H. Nasr, MD (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic,  
22 Rochester, MN) [Nasr.Samih@mayo.edu](mailto:Nasr.Samih@mayo.edu)
- 23 5. Daniel Jethanamest, MD (Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, NYU)  
24 [daniel.jethanamest@nyumc.org](mailto:daniel.jethanamest@nyumc.org)
- 25 6. Ellen D. McPhail, MD (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic,  
26 Rochester, MN) [mcphail.ellen@mayo.edu](mailto:mcphail.ellen@mayo.edu)
- 27 7. Paul J. Kurtin, MD (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic,  
28 Rochester, MN) [kurtin.paul@mayo.edu](mailto:kurtin.paul@mayo.edu)
- 29 8. Surendra Dasari, PhD (Department of Health Sciences Research, Mayo Clinic, Rochester,  
30 MN) [Dasari.Surendra@mayo.edu](mailto:Dasari.Surendra@mayo.edu)
- 31 9. Malinda Butz, BS (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic,  
32 Rochester, MN) [Butz.Malinda@mayo.edu](mailto:Butz.Malinda@mayo.edu)
- 33 10. Cynthia C. Morton, PhD (Departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology and of Pathology,  
34 Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA; Broad Institute of  
35 MIT and Harvard, Cambridge, MA; University of Manchester, Manchester Academic  
36 Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK) [cmorton@bwh.harvard.edu](mailto:cmorton@bwh.harvard.edu)
- 37 11. W. Edward Highsmith, PhD\* (Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo  
38 Clinic, Rochester, MN) [Highsmith.W@mayo.edu](mailto:Highsmith.W@mayo.edu)  
39 \* in memoriam
- 40 12. Fang Zhou, MD (Department of Pathology, NYU) [fang.zhou@nyu.edu](mailto:fang.zhou@nyu.edu)

41

42 **Corresponding author**

43 Fang Zhou, MD

44

45 Address:

46 NYU Langone Hospital, Department of Pathology

47 560 First Avenue, TH 3-83

48 New York, N.Y. 10016

49

50 Email address: [fang.zhou@nyu.edu](mailto:fang.zhou@nyu.edu)

51 Telephone: 212-263-4895

52 Fax number: 212-263-7916

53

54 • Text pages: 10 (excluding the cover letter, title page, and figure legends)

55 • Number of tables: 0

56 • Numbers of figures: 7

57 **Funding**

58 C. C. Morton is supported by NIDCD R01DC015052 and the University of Manchester NIHR

59 Biomedical Research Centre

60 **Acknowledgments**

61 We acknowledge Mayo Clinic Clinical Tissue Proteomics Laboratory for performing mass  
62 spectrometry experiments.

63 **Conflict of interest**

64 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

65 **Abstract (word count 248)**

66 Pathogenic variants in *COCH*, encoding cochlin, cause DFNA9 deafness disorder with  
67 characteristic histopathologic findings of cochlin deposits in the inner and middle ears. Here, we  
68 present the first case of deafness associated with bilateral external auditory canal (EAC) cochlin  
69 deposits, previously unreported evidence suggestive of cochlin-derived amyloid formation, and a  
70 novel *COCH* variant.

71 A 54-year-old woman presented with progressive sensorineural hearing loss and bilateral EAC  
72 narrowing by subcutaneous thickening. Excision and histologic evaluation of tissue from both  
73 EACs showed paucicellular eosinophilic deposits containing multiple Congo red-positive foci with  
74 yellow and green birefringence under crossed polarization light microscopy. Mass spectrometry  
75 performed on both the Congo red-positive and Congo red-negative areas identified cochlin as the  
76 most abundant protein, as well as a low abundance of universal amyloid signature peptides only  
77 in the Congo red-positive areas. Peptides indicative of a canonical amyloid type were not detected.  
78 Electron microscopy showed haphazard, branched microfibrils (3-7 nm in diameter) consistent  
79 with cochlin, as well as swirling fibrils (10-24 nm in diameter) reminiscent of amyloid fibrils.  
80 Cochlin immunohistochemical staining showed positivity throughout the deposits. Sequencing of  
81 the entire *COCH* gene coding region from the patient's blood revealed a novel variant resulting in  
82 a non-conservative amino acid substitution of isoleucine to phenylalanine (c.1621A>T, p.I541F)  
83 in the vWFA2 domain in the protein's C-terminus.

84 Our findings reveal a new pathologic manifestation of cochlin, raise the possibility of previously  
85 undescribed cochlin-derived amyloid formation, and highlight the importance of thoroughly  
86 investigating all aggregative tissue findings in the practice of diagnostic pathology.

87 **Keywords**

88 Congo red; external ear canal stenosis; cochlin; amyloid; liquid chromatography tandem mass  
89 spectrometry; deafness

90 **MANUSCRIPT**

91 **Introduction**

92 Cochlin, the protein product of a deafness gene named coagulation factor C homology (*COCH*),  
93 is the most abundantly detected protein in the normal inner ear (cochlear and vestibular labyrinths)  
94 [1, 2]. Cochlin is also normally present in the middle ear interossicular joints and tympanic  
95 membrane pars tensa [3]. Pathogenic variants in *COCH* result in a distinct aggregative  
96 histopathology in these structures of the inner and middle ears [4, 5, 1, 6, 3]. To date, 29 distinct  
97 *COCH* mutations worldwide (Fig. 1) are known to cause DFNA9, an autosomal dominant disease  
98 consisting of progressive sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) often accompanied by balance  
99 dysfunction. *COCH* is expressed at lower levels in normal cerebellum, eye, spleen, lung, brain,  
100 and thymus [7]. The protein is also found as aggregates in the trabecular meshwork of  
101 glaucomatous eyes in mice and human cadavers, but not in healthy eyes [8].

102 Cochlin is an extracellular protein consisting of the following domains (Fig. 1): coagulation factor  
103 C homology at the N-terminus (LCCL domain), which is thought to serve host defense functions,  
104 followed by two von Willebrand factor A-like domains (vWFA1 and vWFA2). vWFA domains  
105 are also present in a variety of other extracellular matrix (ECM) proteins, including several  
106 collagen types and cartilage matrix protein, and bind other proteins like fibrillar collagens,  
107 glycoproteins, and proteoglycans. Cochlin may serve a structural and tissue support role in the  
108 stabilization of the ECM. In addition, recent reports have elucidated an immune function of  
109 cochlin's LCCL domain, which has been associated with cytokine production, macrophage  
110 activation, and immune cell recruitment after exposure to pathogens, both systemically and locally  
111 in the inner ear compartment [9-11]. The dominant negative effects of *COCH* pathogenic variants  
112 are attributed to the gain of a deleterious function of cochlin, cochlin aggregation, and deposit  
113 formation. This is similar to other aggregative disorders such as Huntington disease (HD), wherein  
114 mechanisms of deposit formation result from gain-of-function due to gene alterations (*i.e.*,  
115 polyglutamine expansion in HD). The effects of *COCH* pathogenic variants on the immune and

116 inflammatory functions of cochlin are unknown, but nonetheless are likely not directly linked to  
117 the aggregative properties of cochlin.

118 *In vitro* studies have revealed that pathogenic variants in the LCCL domain can cause misfolding  
119 and multimerization of cochlin, and vWFA domain mutations can result in secretion failure and  
120 aggregate formation [12, 13]. In terms of DFNA9 histopathology as a result of *COCH* pathogenic  
121 variants, there are prominent eosinophilic acellular cochlin deposits and polymucosaccharide  
122 ground substance in the inner ear, which is the sensorineural portion of the auditory system [4, 5,  
123 1]. There is remarkable loss of cellularity of the fibrocytes which express *COCH*, and downstream  
124 neuronal degeneration. Temporal bones from DFNA9 patients also exhibit both eosinophilic and  
125 basophilic aggregates in the conductive portion of the auditory system, depositing in the middle  
126 ear interossicular joints and causing thickening of the tympanic membrane [6, 3].

127 Here, we present the first report of Congo red-positive cochlin deposits in the external auditory  
128 canals (EACs) of a patient with SNHL (along with a family history of hearing loss), evidence  
129 suggesting amyloid formation by cochlin protein, and the presence of a novel *COCH* variant  
130 resulting in a non-conservative amino acid substitution.

### 131 **Case description**

132 A 54-year-old woman presented with progressive bilateral sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL). She  
133 had some high-frequency hearing loss since childhood and started wearing hearing aids in her early  
134 30s. The patient's hearing did not improve with the use of a hearing aid or prednisone eardrops. In  
135 the last 7 years, she required frequent cerumen cleanings. She also had a family history of early-  
136 onset hearing loss in her brother, sister, and father. Her brother and father both had severe hearing  
137 loss starting in their 30s, while her sister only had mild high frequency hearing loss and did not  
138 wear any hearing aids. In addition, her brother and father both had glaucoma and the patient herself  
139 exhibited bilateral elevated intraocular pressures.

140 The patient went through an autoimmune workup, which revealed only an elevated anti-nuclear  
141 antibody (ANA). There was no other significant past medical or surgical history. Otomicroscopic  
142 examination revealed narrowing of both external auditory canals (EACs), left greater than right,  
143 with skin thickening but normal skin surface. Cerumen from the left EAC was removed. The  
144 remaining slit opening showed a limited view of the tympanic membrane (Fig. 2a). Cranial nerve  
145 examination was otherwise unremarkable and there were no other significant findings on physical  
146 examination.

147 An audiogram revealed mild sloping to profound SNHL in both ears. A computed tomography  
148 (CT) scan showed bilateral concentric soft tissue thickening of the EACs, without bony erosion.  
149 The stenosis involved the left EAC more so than the right, with nearly complete stenosis of the left  
150 EAC.

151 The patient underwent left meatoplasty and canaloplasty (Fig. 2b), followed by right meatoplasty  
152 and canaloplasty 16 months later. During both procedures, tan, gelatinous, semi-firm,  
153 subcutaneous soft tissue elements were identified in the cartilaginous EAC that appeared well-  
154 encapsulated grossly (Fig. 3a). As expected, the surgeries did not improve the patient's hearing  
155 loss because of its sensorineural nature. A conductive hearing loss component was not detected,  
156 but it may have been masked by the profound SNHL.

## 157 **Methods**

158 The specimens from both EACs were processed into formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded (FFPE)  
159 blocks at New York University Langone Hospital, where four-micron-thick sections were stained  
160 with hematoxylin and eosin (H&E), and eight-micron-thick sections were stained with Congo red  
161 using the Congo red staining kit and NexES Special Stains automated slide stainer from Ventana  
162 Medical Systems, Inc (Tucson, Arizona). At Mayo Clinic Laboratories in Rochester, MN, the  
163 Congo red stains were repeated and further characterization of the Congo red-positive material in  
164 each specimen was performed by liquid chromatography tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS)

165 [14]. Immunohistochemical staining of FFPE sections with an anti-cochlin antibody was  
166 performed as previously described, in the Morton Laboratory of Brigham and Women's Hospital  
167 [1]. A portion of the specimen from the right ear was placed in glutaraldehyde solution for  
168 transmission electron microscopy (TEM) at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. Gene sequencing  
169 was performed by next-generation sequencing and Sanger sequencing as previously described  
170 [15], at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN.

## 171 **Results**

172 Histologic evaluation of the subcutaneous soft tissue from both ears showed paucicellular  
173 eosinophilic deposits (Fig. 3b) that appeared vaguely fibrillary on low power but also contained  
174 numerous small amorphous foci, visible at high power. Congo red stain revealed multiple small  
175 Congo red-positive foci (Fig. 3c) with yellow and green birefringence under crossed polarization  
176 light microscopy (Fig. 3d). Focal chondroid and bony areas and benign squamous epithelium were  
177 also present within the specimen.

178 LC-MS/MS was performed on the FFPE specimens from both ears, with the Congo red-positive  
179 and Congo red-negative areas within the tissue being analyzed separately. The Congo red-positive  
180 foci contained abundant cochlin protein spectra, as well as the universal amyloid proteome  
181 signature peptides (serum amyloid P component, apolipoprotein A4, and apolipoprotein E) in low  
182 abundance. Peptides indicative of a canonical amyloid type were not detected. In contrast, LC-  
183 MS/MS performed on the Congo red-negative foci identified abundant cochlin protein spectra but  
184 were essentially devoid of the universal amyloid proteome signature peptides (Fig. 4).  
185 Immunohistochemistry (IHC) using an anti-cochlin antibody confirmed the presence of cochlin,  
186 showing diffuse staining in the deposits (Fig. 5a) with no reactivity in areas of bone, entrapped  
187 collagen, or fibrin (Fig. 5b).

188 A variety of collagens were also detected by LC-MS/MS in both the Congo red-positive and Congo  
189 red-negative areas, including collagen alpha-1(I) chain, collagen alpha-2(I) chain, collagen alpha-



190 3(VI) chain, collagen alpha-1(VI) chain, collagen alpha-1(III) chain, and collagen alpha-2(VI)  
191 chain. Of these, collagen alpha-1(I) chain, collagen alpha-2 (I) chains showed the most abundant  
192 spectral counts, and were present in greater abundance in the Congo red-positive areas than the  
193 Congo red-negative areas. However, the cochlin spectral counts were much higher (Fig. 4).

194 TEM showed massive deposition of electron-dense material in the extracellular space (Fig. 6a).  
195 Similar material was also seen surrounding and within the walls of small vessels (not shown). On  
196 higher power, the electron-dense material was composed of densely-packed microfibrils. In some  
197 areas, the fibrils were arranged in a swirling pattern and measured 10-24 nm (average 14 nm) in  
198 diameter; these areas were reminiscent of amyloid fibrils (compare with much wider and striated  
199 collagen fibrils on the right upper corner of Fig. 6b). However, in other areas, the microfibrils were  
200 haphazardly oriented, appeared branched, measured 3-7 nm (average 5 nm) in diameter, and were  
201 decorated with granular substance consistent with glycosaminoglycans (Fig. 6c); the appearance  
202 of the fibrils in these latter areas are similar to those of cochlin deposition previously described in  
203 a patient with DFNA9 [16].

204 Next-generation sequencing of the entire coding region of the *COCH* gene from the patient's blood  
205 identified a novel heterozygous germline variant in exon 12, resulting in a non-conservative amino  
206 acid substitution of isoleucine to phenylalanine (c.1621A>T, p.I541F) in the vWFA2 domain in  
207 the C-terminus of cochlin protein (Fig. 1). This was confirmed by Sanger sequencing, which  
208 showed overlapping nucleic acid residues, adenine (A) and thymine (T), indicating heterozygosity  
209 for the variant in this position (Fig. 7).

## 210 **Discussion**

211 Abnormal cochlin deposits are known to occur in the inner and middle ears of patients with  
212 DFNA9 deafness as a result of *COCH* mutations [1]. To date, there are no reports of cochlin  
213 deposition in the external auditory canal (EAC). Here, we have presented a patient with bilateral  
214 EAC stenosis and SNHL (Fig. 2a) caused by cochlin deposits (“cochlinomas”) that show evidence  
215 of amyloid formation, associated with a novel variant in the *COCH* gene.

216 The following findings provided ample evidence that the deposits were composed of cochlin  
217 protein: LC-MS/MS demonstrated abundant cochlin peptide spectra throughout the specimens  
218 from both ears (Fig. 4); cochlin IHC was positive (Fig. 5a); and TEM showed similarities with  
219 previously published EM images of cochlin deposition (Fig. 6c) [16]. Amyloid formation was first  
220 suspected due to the presence of numerous Congo red-positive foci (Fig. 3c) with yellow and green  
221 birefringence under crossed polarization light microscopy (Fig. 3d), which prompted further  
222 workup by protein typing. LC-MS/MS demonstrated a low abundance of universal amyloid  
223 proteome signature peptides that were restricted to the Congo red-positive areas in the absence of  
224 any protein currently known to form amyloid, raising the possibility of cochlin-derived amyloid  
225 formation within the “cochlinomas” (Fig. 4). TEM also corroborated this possibility by revealing  
226 swirling fibrils 10-24 nm in diameter (average 14 nm) that were reminiscent of amyloid (Fig. 6b).  
227 Furthermore, both next-generation sequencing and Sanger sequencing performed on the patient's  
228 blood identified a heterozygous novel variant in the *COCH* gene which encodes cochlin (Figs. 1  
229 and 7).

230 In diagnostic surgical pathology, Congo red-positive amorphous deposits with yellow and green  
231 birefringence under crossed polarization light microscopy elicits a provisional diagnosis of  
232 amyloidosis. While Congo red-positive amyloid deposits in the external ear have been reported as  
233 a form of primary cutaneous amyloidosis in the auricular concha [17], Congo red reactivity of  
234 cochlin protein has not been previously described in the published literature. Rarely, entities other  
235 than amyloid may be Congo red-positive, such as DNAJB9 protein in fibrillary glomerulonephritis  
236 [18]. In addition, Congo red is a technically challenging stain. Variations in staining conditions,  
237 such as solvent type, salt concentration, pH, etc can cause false-positive staining of non-amyloid  
238 molecules such as collagen, elastic fibers, and keratin. Cautionary artefact can also cause false-  
239 positive staining. Variations in staining conditions can cause false-negative Congo red results as  
240 well [19]. Therefore, it is imperative that the Congo red staining conditions are correct. If a  
241 microscope does not have a strong light source, the characteristic colors of a positive Congo red  
242 stain under crossed polarization light microscopy may not be noticeable to the observer, especially  
243 if the positive areas are small and/or focal. Lastly, it is important to remember that when examining  
244 a Congo red stained slide, the two polarizing filters need to be on either side of the specimen: one

245 is filter is placed between the light source and the specimen (called the "polarizer"), while the other  
246 filter is placed between the specimen and the observer (called the "analyzer") [20].

247 Once Congo red-positivity is established, it is essential to type the Congo red-positive deposit to  
248 help guide the clinical workup and treatment [21]. LC-MS/MS is the most accurate method for  
249 typing amyloidosis in light of its high sensitivity and specificity, and is considered the gold  
250 standard for amyloid typing [14]. Furthermore, as an unbiased, shotgun proteomics-based assay,  
251 it is able to identify rare and potentially previously-unrecognized amyloid types.

252 In our patient, sequencing of the entire coding region of the *COCH* gene revealed a novel variant  
253 (c.1621A>T, p.I541F) in the vWFA2 domain in the protein's C-terminus (Figs. 1 and 7). The  
254 immediately adjacent amino acid (position 542) is a cysteine residue, which is critical for the  
255 structural and functional integrity of cochlin. Three distinct mutations of this cysteine residue have  
256 been reported to cause DFNA9 deafness disorder. It has been shown that changes at residue C542  
257 disrupt cochlin intramolecular disulfide bonding [22]. It is likely that in our case, the non-  
258 conservative amino acid change in the immediately adjacent (position 541) isoleucine (an aliphatic  
259 amino acid residue) to phenylalanine (a bulky aromatic residue) also interferes with proper protein  
260 folding and disrupts the overall tertiary structure of cochlin, possibly causing amyloid-like  
261 structural changes. Furthermore, variants in the vWFA2 domain may result in abnormal collagen  
262 binding with potential disruption of normal extracellular matrix composition.

263 Given the sensorineural nature of the patient's hearing loss, it is possible that she has undetected  
264 deposits in the inner and middle ears similar to other patients with DFNA9, but uniquely with  
265 extension into the external ear canal. It is unknown whether the patient's hearing-impaired family  
266 members share the same genetic variant. Also, the significance of the patient's and her family's  
267 increased intraorbital pressures is unknown. However, further exploration of these uncertainties is  
268 not feasible at this time.

## 269 **Conclusion**

270 In summary, we have described the first case of bilateral external auditory canal deposits consisting  
271 of cochlin protein with numerous amyloid-like deposits, in a patient with sensorineural hearing  
272 loss. The patient has a novel variant in her *COCH* gene that corresponds to the vWFA2 domain in  
273 cochlin protein's C-terminus (heterozygous c.1621A>T, p.I541F). Our case study illustrates a new  
274 manifestation of cochlin, and our evidence from Congo red stain, immunohistochemical stain, LC-  
275 MS/MS, and electron microscopy raise the possibility of previously undescribed cochlin-derived  
276 amyloid formation. Further studies are needed to explore the possible disease mechanisms implied  
277 by this novel *COCH* variant, its corresponding alterations to cochlin's structure and functions, as  
278 well as its microscopic and clinical manifestations.

279 Our report highlights the need for thorough characterization of aggregative tissue findings in the  
280 practice of diagnostic surgical pathology. In our case, the specimen was paucicellular and there  
281 was an absence of cellular clues such as plasma cells or multinucleated histiocytes, thereby  
282 appearing rather "plain" at first glance. Given its fibrillary features at low power, it can potentially  
283 be dismissed as sclerosis or fibrosis. The Congo red stain was positive in multiple small foci, and  
284 was not diffuse. However, our report demonstrates that aggregative deposits from anywhere in the  
285 ear, even with small amorphous foci, warrant further work-up for the possibility of "cochlinoma,"  
286 particularly if the patient has hearing impairment. The mindful pathologist incorporates the  
287 burgeoning array of ancillary testing modalities into his or her diagnostic algorithm to identify  
288 diseases "hiding in plain sight."

## 289 **References**

- 290 1. Robertson NG, Cremers CW, Huygen PL, Ikezono T, Krastins B, Kremer H et al. Cochlin  
291 immunostaining of inner ear pathologic deposits and proteomic analysis in DFNA9 deafness and  
292 vestibular dysfunction. *Human molecular genetics*. 2006;15(7):1071-85. doi:10.1093/hmg/ddl022.  
293
- 294 2. Ikezono T, Omori A, Ichinose S, Pawankar R, Watanabe A, Yagi T. Identification of the protein  
295 product of the Coch gene (hereditary deafness gene) as the major component of bovine inner ear  
296 protein. *Biochimica et biophysica acta*. 2001;1535(3):258-65.  
297
- 298 3. Robertson NG, O'Malley JT, Ong CA, Giersch AB, Shen J, Stankovic KM et al. Cochlin in  
299 normal middle ear and abnormal middle ear deposits in DFNA9 and Coch (G88E/G88E) mice.

- 300 Journal of the Association for Research in Otolaryngology : JARO. 2014;15(6):961-74.  
301 doi:10.1007/s10162-014-0481-9.  
302
- 303 4. Robertson NG, Lu L, Heller S, Merchant SN, Eavey RD, McKenna M et al. Mutations in a novel  
304 cochlear gene cause DFNA9, a human nonsyndromic deafness with vestibular dysfunction. *Nature*  
305 *genetics*. 1998;20(3):299-303. doi:10.1038/3118.  
306
- 307 5. Khetarpal U, Schuknecht HF, Gacek RR, Holmes LB. Autosomal dominant sensorineural  
308 hearing loss. Pedigrees, audiologic findings, and temporal bone findings in two kindreds. *Archives*  
309 *of otolaryngology--head & neck surgery*. 1991;117(9):1032-42.  
310
- 311 6. McCall AA, Linthicum FH, Jr., O'Malley JT, Adams JC, Merchant SN, Bassim MK et al.  
312 Extralabyrinthine manifestations of DFNA9. *Journal of the Association for Research in*  
313 *Otolaryngology : JARO*. 2011;12(2):141-9. doi:10.1007/s10162-010-0245-0.  
314
- 315 7. Robertson NG, Skvorak AB, Yin Y, Weremowicz S, Johnson KR, Kovatch KA et al. Mapping  
316 and characterization of a novel cochlear gene in human and in mouse: a positional candidate gene  
317 for a deafness disorder, DFNA9. *Genomics*. 1997;46(3):345-54. doi:10.1006/geno.1997.5067.  
318
- 319 8. Picciani R, Desai K, Guduric-Fuchs J, Cogliati T, Morton CC, Bhattacharya SK. Cochlin in the  
320 eye: functional implications. *Progress in retinal and eye research*. 2007;26(5):453-69.  
321 doi:10.1016/j.preteyeres.2007.06.002.  
322
- 323 9. Py BF, Gonzalez SF, Long K, Kim MS, Kim YA, Zhu H et al. Cochlin produced by follicular  
324 dendritic cells promotes antibacterial innate immunity. *Immunity*. 2013;38(5):1063-72.  
325 doi:10.1016/j.immuni.2013.01.015.  
326
- 327 10. Nystrom A, Bornert O, Kuhl T, Gretzmeier C, Thriene K, Dengjel J et al. Impaired lymphoid  
328 extracellular matrix impedes antibacterial immunity in epidermolysis bullosa. *Proceedings of the*  
329 *National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 2018;115(4):E705-e14.  
330 doi:10.1073/pnas.1709111115.  
331
- 332 11. Jung J, Yoo JE, Choe YH, Park SC, Lee HJ, Lee HJ et al. Cleaved Cochlin Sequesters  
333 *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and Activates Innate Immunity in the Inner Ear. *Cell host & microbe*.  
334 2019;25(4):513-25.e6. doi:10.1016/j.chom.2019.02.001.  
335
- 336 12. Bae SH, Robertson NG, Cho HJ, Morton CC, Jung DJ, Baek JI et al. Identification of  
337 pathogenic mechanisms of COCH mutations, abolished cochlin secretion, and intracellular  
338 aggregate formation: genotype-phenotype correlations in DFNA9 deafness and vestibular  
339 disorder. *Human mutation*. 2014;35(12):1506-13. doi:10.1002/humu.22701.  
340
- 341 13. Cho HJ, Park HJ, Trexler M, Venselaar H, Lee KY, Robertson NG et al. A novel COCH  
342 mutation associated with autosomal dominant nonsyndromic hearing loss disrupts the structural  
343 stability of the vWFA2 domain. *Journal of molecular medicine (Berlin, Germany)*.  
344 2012;90(11):1321-31. doi:10.1007/s00109-012-0911-2.

- 345 14. Vrana JA, Gamez JD, Madden BJ, Theis JD, Bergen HR, 3rd, Dogan A. Classification of  
346 amyloidosis by laser microdissection and mass spectrometry-based proteomic analysis in clinical  
347 biopsy specimens. *Blood*. 2009;114(24):4957-9. doi:10.1182/blood-2009-07-230722.  
348
- 349 15. Baudhuin LM, Lagerstedt SA, Klee EW, Fadra N, Oglesbee D, Ferber MJ. Confirming  
350 Variants in Next-Generation Sequencing Panel Testing by Sanger Sequencing. *The Journal of*  
351 *molecular diagnostics : JMD*. 2015;17(4):456-61. doi:10.1016/j.jmoldx.2015.03.004.  
352
- 353 16. Khetarpal U. DFNA9 is a progressive audiovestibular dysfunction with a microfibrillar deposit  
354 in the inner ear. *The Laryngoscope*. 2000;110(8):1379-84. doi:10.1097/00005537-200008000-  
355 00030.  
356
- 357 17. Abuawad YG, Uchiyama J, Kakizaki P, Valente NYS. Primary cutaneous amyloidosis of the  
358 auricular concha - case report. *Anais brasileiros de dermatologia*. 2017;92(3):433-4.  
359 doi:10.1590/abd1806-4841.20175864.  
360
- 361 18. Alexander MP, Dasari S, Vrana JA, Riopel J, Valeri AM, Markowitz GS et al. Congophilic  
362 Fibrillary Glomerulonephritis: A Case Series. *American journal of kidney diseases : the official*  
363 *journal of the National Kidney Foundation*. 2018;72(3):325-36. doi:10.1053/j.ajkd.2018.03.017.  
364
- 365 19. Yakupova EI, Bobyleva LG, Vikhlyantsev IM, Bobylev AG. Congo Red and amyloids: history  
366 and relationship. *Bioscience reports*. 2019;39(1). doi:10.1042/bsr20181415.  
367
- 368 20. Howie AJ, Brewer DB. Optical properties of amyloid stained by Congo red: history and  
369 mechanisms. *Micron (Oxford, England : 1993)*. 2009;40(3):285-301.  
370 doi:10.1016/j.micron.2008.10.002.  
371
- 372 21. Rocken C, Sletten K. Amyloid in surgical pathology. *Virchows Archiv : an international*  
373 *journal of pathology*. 2003;443(1):3-16. doi:10.1007/s00428-003-0834-y.  
374
- 375 22. Street VA, Kallman JC, Robertson NG, Kuo SF, Morton CC, Phillips JO. A novel DFNA9  
376 mutation in the vWFA2 domain of COCH alters a conserved cysteine residue and intrachain  
377 disulfide bond formation resulting in progressive hearing loss and site-specific vestibular and  
378 central oculomotor dysfunction. *American journal of medical genetics Part A*. 2005;139a(2):86-  
379 95. doi:10.1002/ajmg.a.30980.

## 380 **Figure Legends**

381 **Fig. 1** Schematic representation of *COCH* gene, encoding cochlin, showing the signal peptide (SP)  
382 for secretion, followed by the LCCL domain, and intervening domain (ivd1) followed by two  
383 vWFA-like domains separated by ivd2. Positions of previously known pathogenic variants (27  
384 missense and 2 in-frame deletions) are indicated in black. The novel I541F variant (the subject of  
385 our current report) is shown in red and with an asterisk. Positions of all cysteine residues (C),

386 which are critical for disulfide bond formation and the structural integrity of the protein, are  
387 indicated.

388 **Fig. 2 (a)** A presurgical view of the left external auditory canal with speculum in place, revealing  
389 significant soft tissue stenosis with normal overlying skin. **(b)** Post-surgically, a wide view to the  
390 intact tympanic membrane was appreciated.

391 **Fig. 3 (a)** During the meatoplasty and bony canaloplasty procedure, incisions were created,  
392 anterior and posterior flaps were raised, well-encapsulated tan brown soft tissue was detected  
393 beneath the skin (white arrow), and all abnormal subcutaneous soft tissue was excised. **(b)**  
394 Histologic examination of the subcutaneous soft tissue revealed paucicellular eosinophilic deposits  
395 with numerous small amorphous foci (H&E stain, 10x). **(c)** There were multiple Congo red-  
396 positive foci (Congo red stain, 10x). **(d)** Yellow and green birefringence under crossed polarization  
397 light microscopy was observed (Congo red stain, 10x).

398 **Fig. 4** Liquid chromatography tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) performed on both the  
399 Congo red-positive (CR +ve) (samples 1 & 2) and Congo red-negative (CR -ve) (samples 3 & 4)  
400 areas identified abundant cochlin protein spectra throughout, as well as a low abundance of  
401 universal amyloid proteome signature peptides in the Congo red-positive areas but not in the  
402 Congo red-negative areas. Peptides indicative of a canonical amyloid type were not detected.

403 **Fig. 5 (a)** Immunohistochemistry for cochlin protein showed diffuse staining in the amorphous  
404 deposits, with no reactivity in bone, entrapped stroma, and fibrin (arrows). **(b)** Corresponding  
405 hematoxylin & eosin stained section.

406 **Fig. 6** Transmission electron microscopy. **(a)** There was massive deposition of electron-dense  
407 material in the extracellular space (original magnification, x4800). **(b)** On higher power, the  
408 electron-dense material was composed of densely packed microfibrils. In some areas, the fibrils  
409 were arranged in a swirling pattern, measured 10-24 nm (average 14 nm) in diameter, and were  
410 reminiscent of amyloid fibrils (compare with much larger and striated collagen fibrils on the right  
411 upper corner of the image) (x23,000). **(c)** In other areas, microfibrils were haphazardly oriented,  
412 appeared branched, measured 3-7 nm (average 5 nm) in diameter, and were decorated with  
413 granular substance consistent with glycosaminoglycans (x49,000). They are similar to the fibrils  
414 previously described in a patient with DFNA9.

415 **Fig. 7 (a)** Sanger sequencing traces, highlighting (red arrow) the c.1612A>T (p.Ile541Phe) variant  
416 in *COCH*. Sequencing was performed on both a control specimen and our patient in the forward

417 direction (represented on the top) and in the reverse direction (on the bottom). The sequence traces  
418 show overlapping nucleic acid residues, adenine (A) and thymine (T), in the forward direction,  
419 indicating heterozygosity for the variant in this position. **(b)** Cochlin amino acid sequence,  
420 showing the altered isoleucine (I) residue, highlighted in green.



Figure 1

[Click here to access/download;Figure;Figure 1 - COCH gene schematic.png](#)

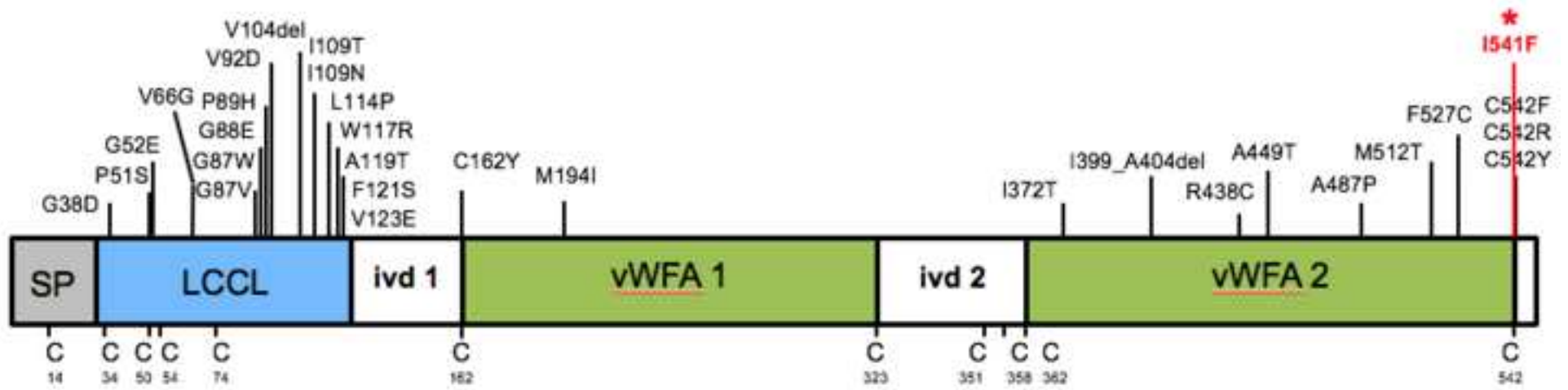


Figure 2A

[Click here to access/download;Figure;Figure 2A - EACStenosis.jpg](#)





Figure 3A

[Click here to access/download;Figure;Figure 3A - EACSubcutaneousTissue.jpg](#)

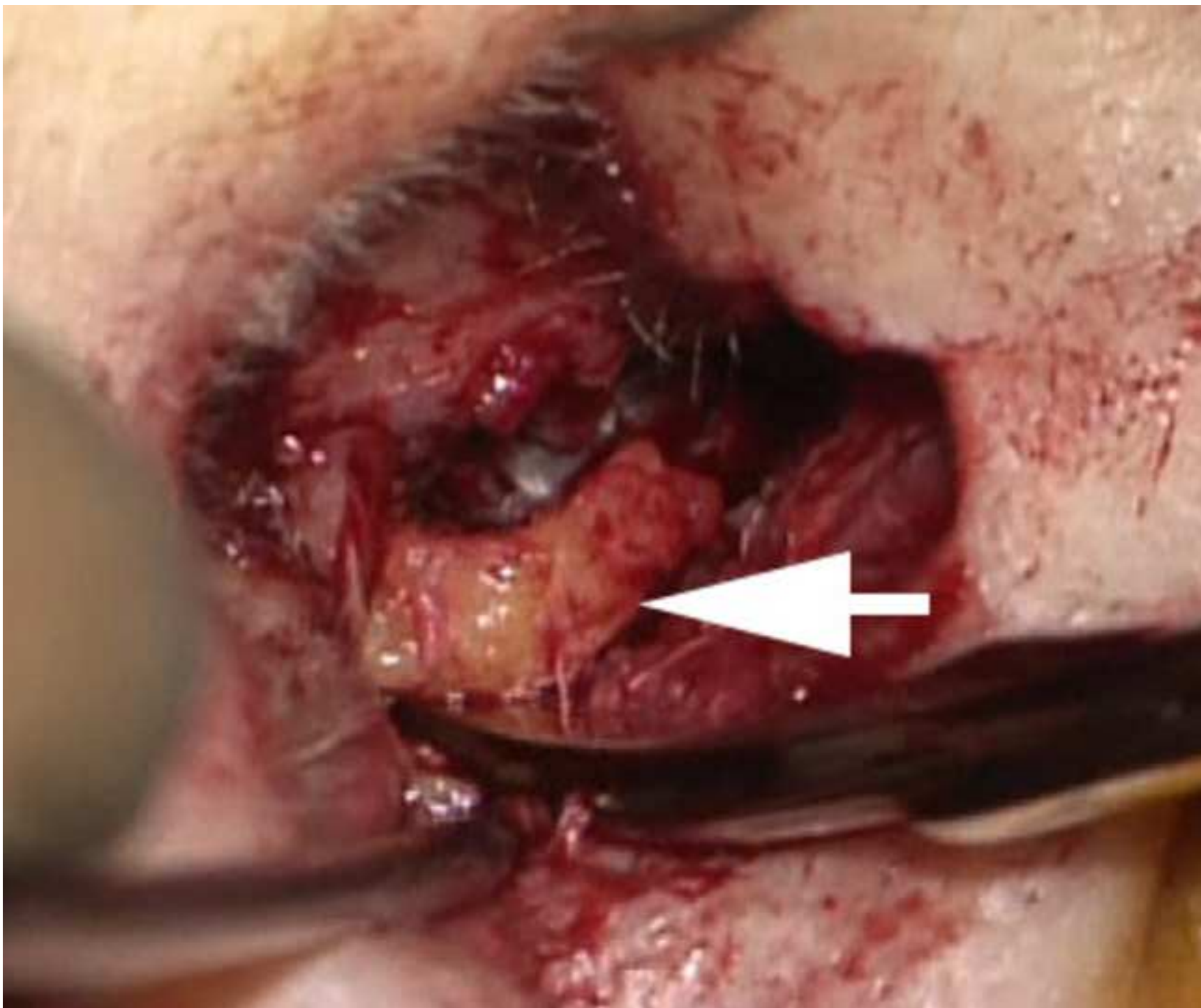
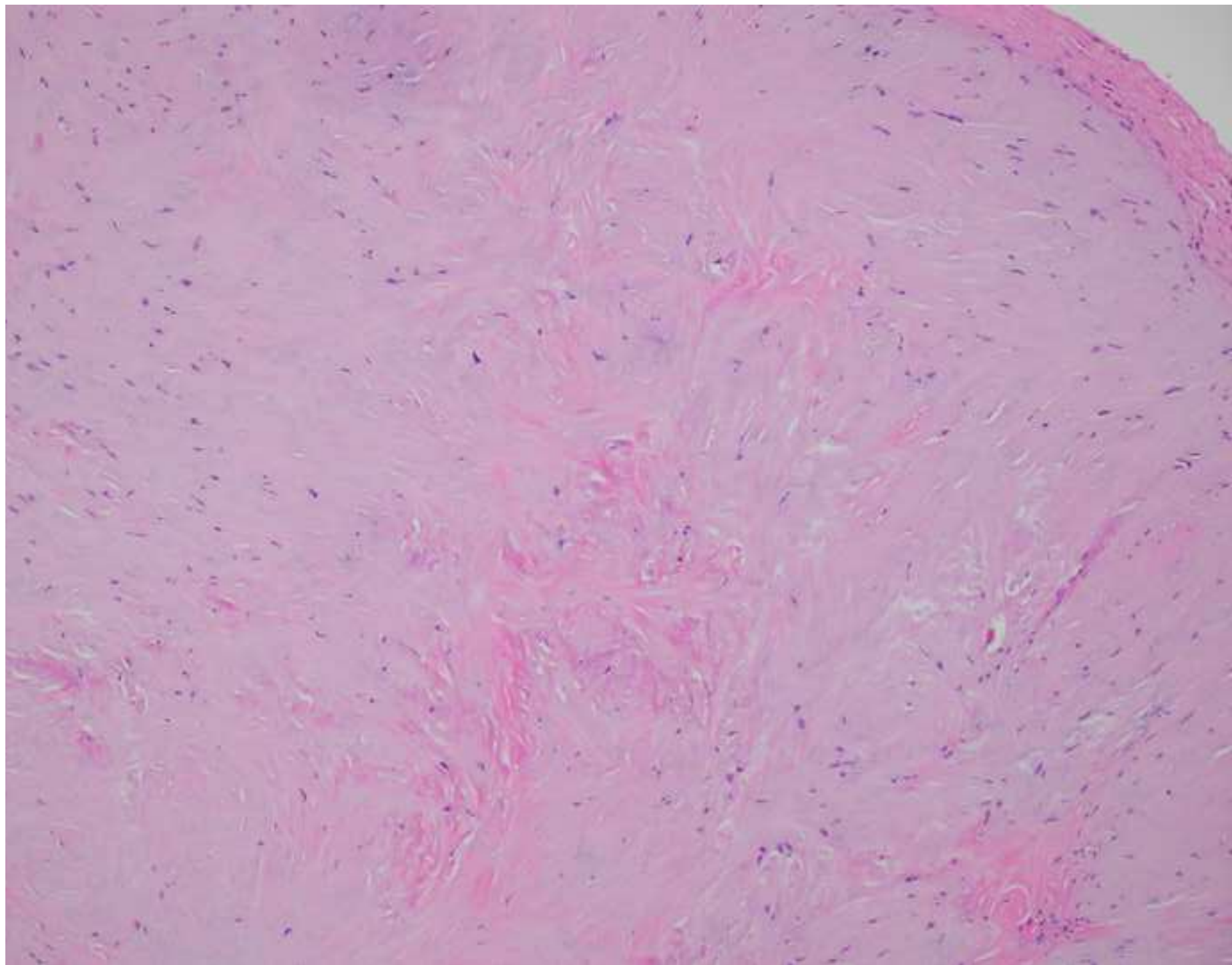
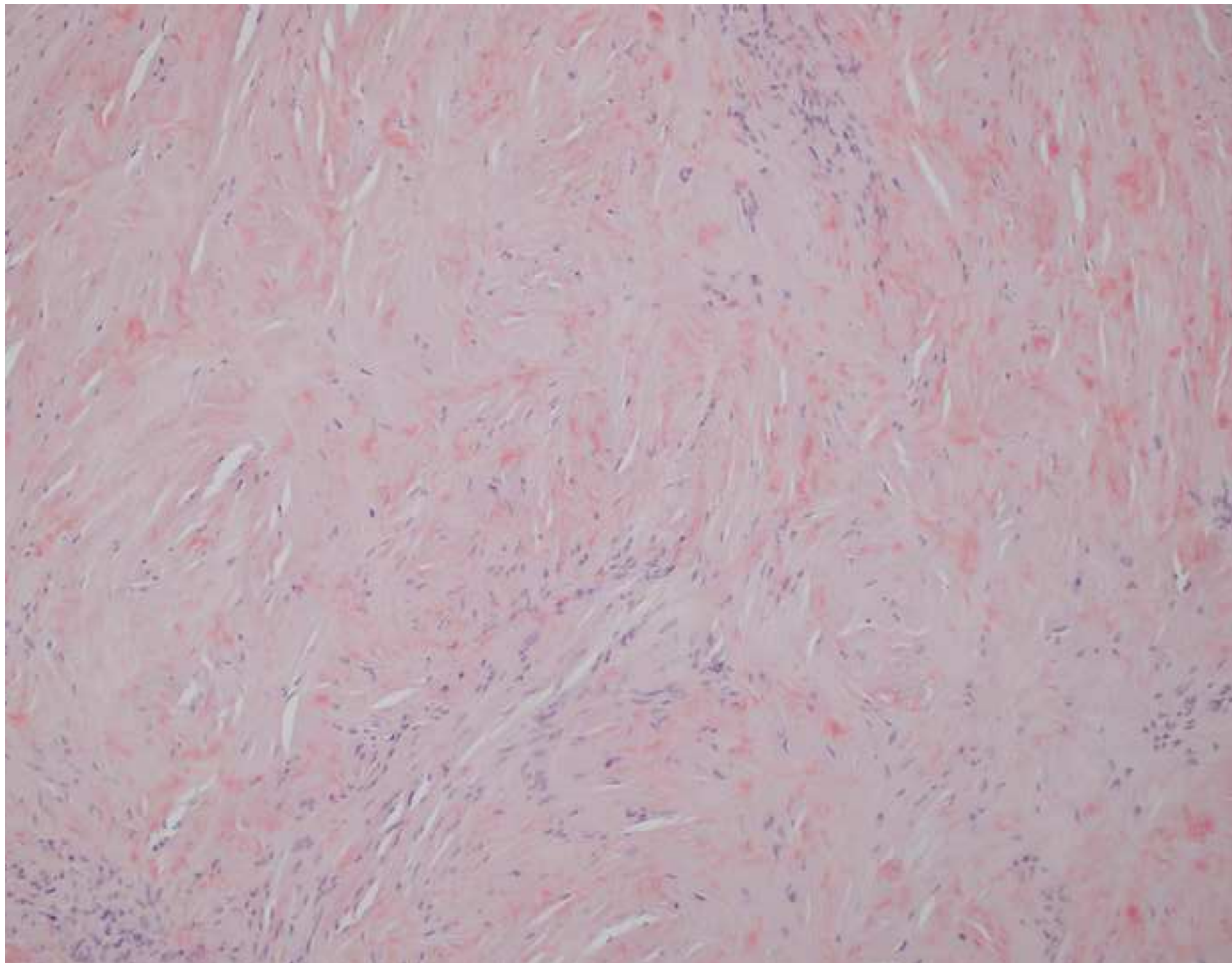
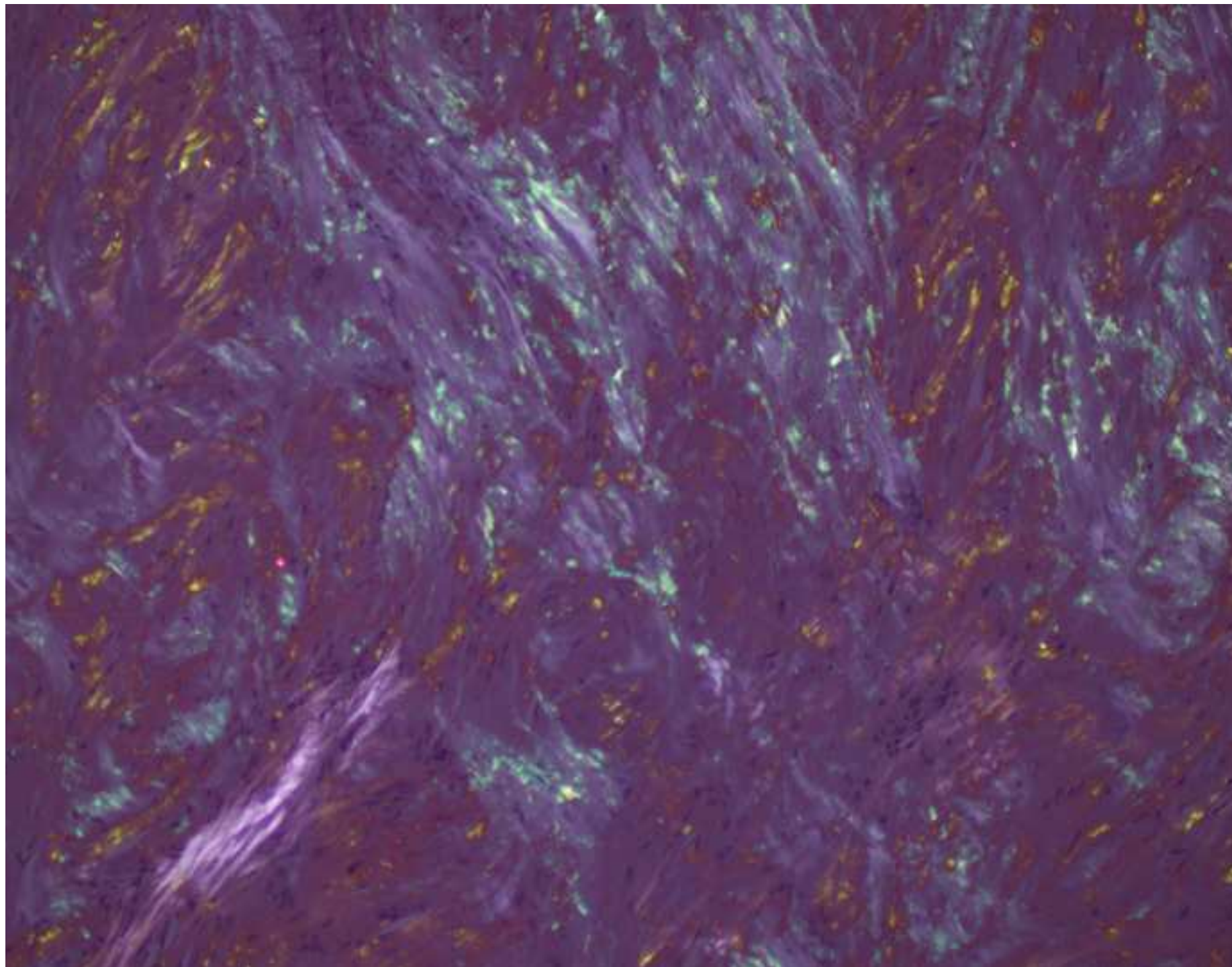


Figure 3B

[Click here to access/download;Figure;Figure 3B - H&E 10x.tif](#)







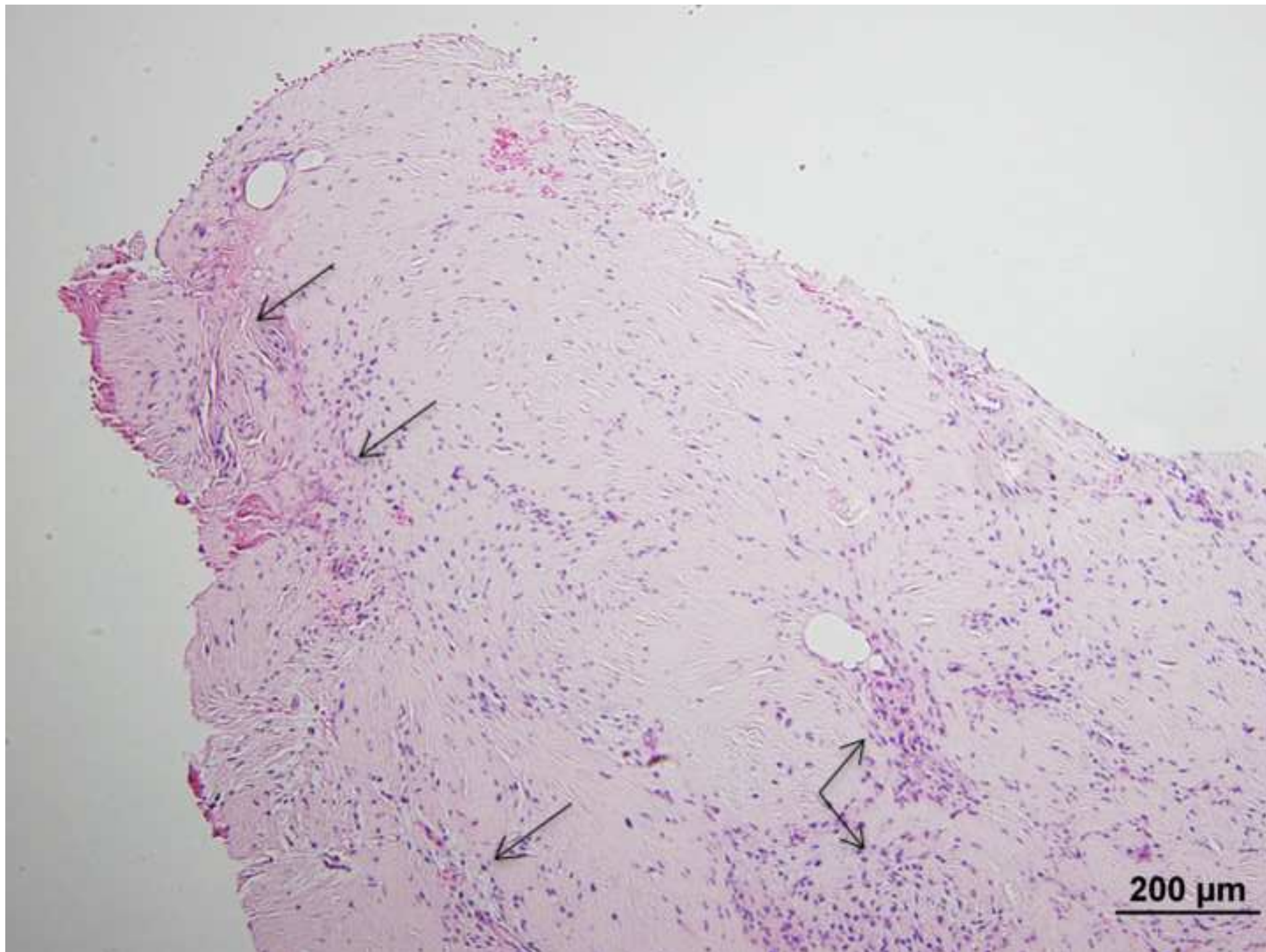
#	Visible?	Starred?	Bio View: Identified Proteins (59/60) Including 2 Decoys	Accession Number	Molecular Weight	Protein Grouping Ambiguity			
						CR +ve Sample 1	CR +ve Sample 2	CR -ve Dense Deposit Sample 3	CR -ve Dense Deposit Sample 4
1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	★ Cochlin	COCH_HUMAN	59 kDa	348	346	393	465
2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	★ Apolipoprotein A-IV	APOA4_HUMAN	45 kDa	20	26	3	
3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	★ Serum amyloid P-component	SAMP_HUMAN	25 kDa	16	14	2	2
4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	★ Apolipoprotein E	APOE_HUMAN	36 kDa	16	17		
5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Vimentin	VIME_HUMAN	54 kDa	★ 104	80	71	186
6	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Serum albumin	ALBU_HUMAN	69 kDa	97	84	113	59
7	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Collagen alpha-2(I) chain	CO1A2_HUMAN	129 kDa	121	102	54	45
8	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Hemoglobin subunit beta	HBB_HUMAN	16 kDa	★ 101	66	93	79
9	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Collagen alpha-1(I) chain	CO1A1_HUMAN	139 kDa	118	100	41	35
10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☆ Hemoglobin subunit alpha	HBA_HUMAN	15 kDa	102	64	80	64

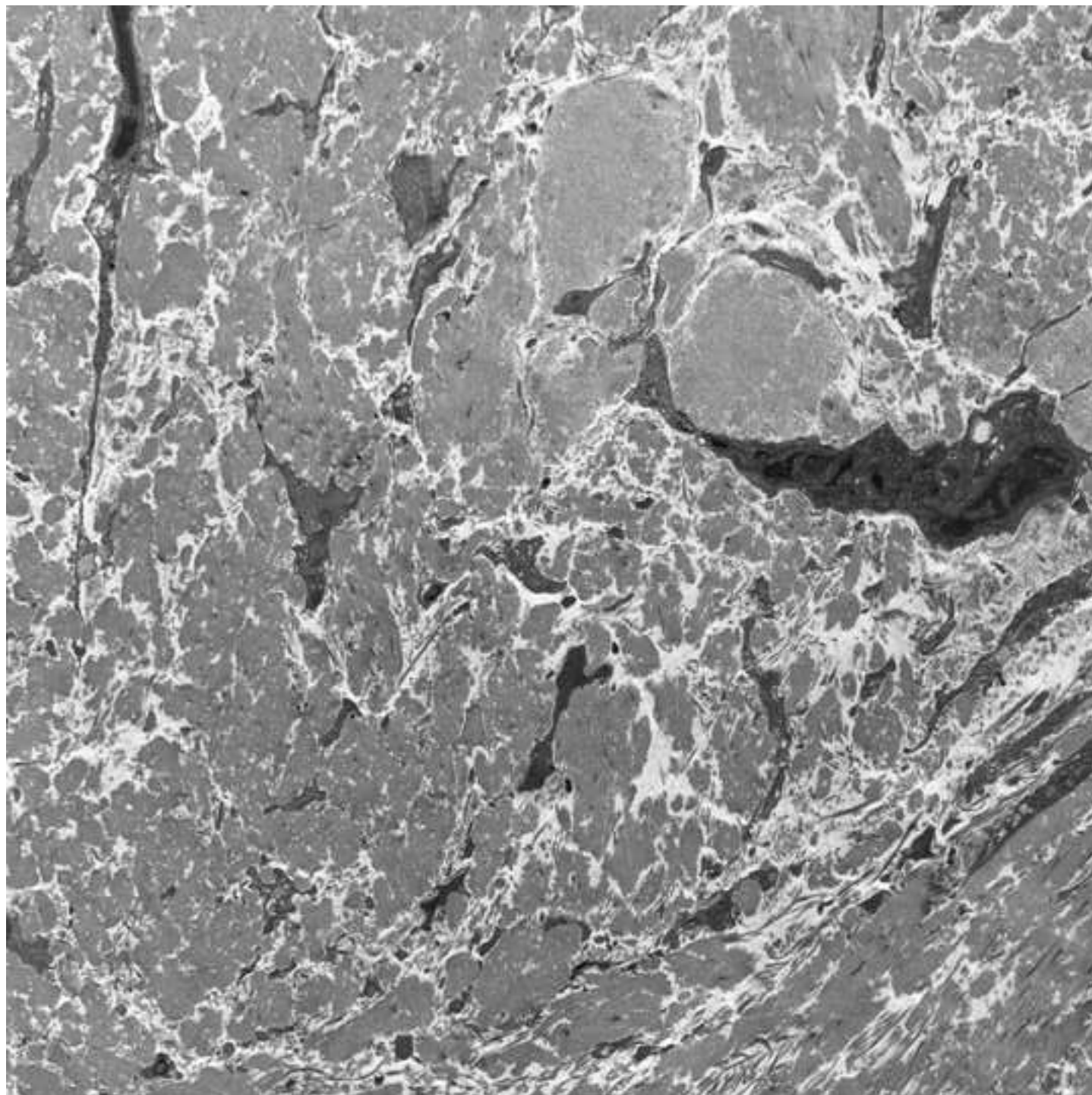


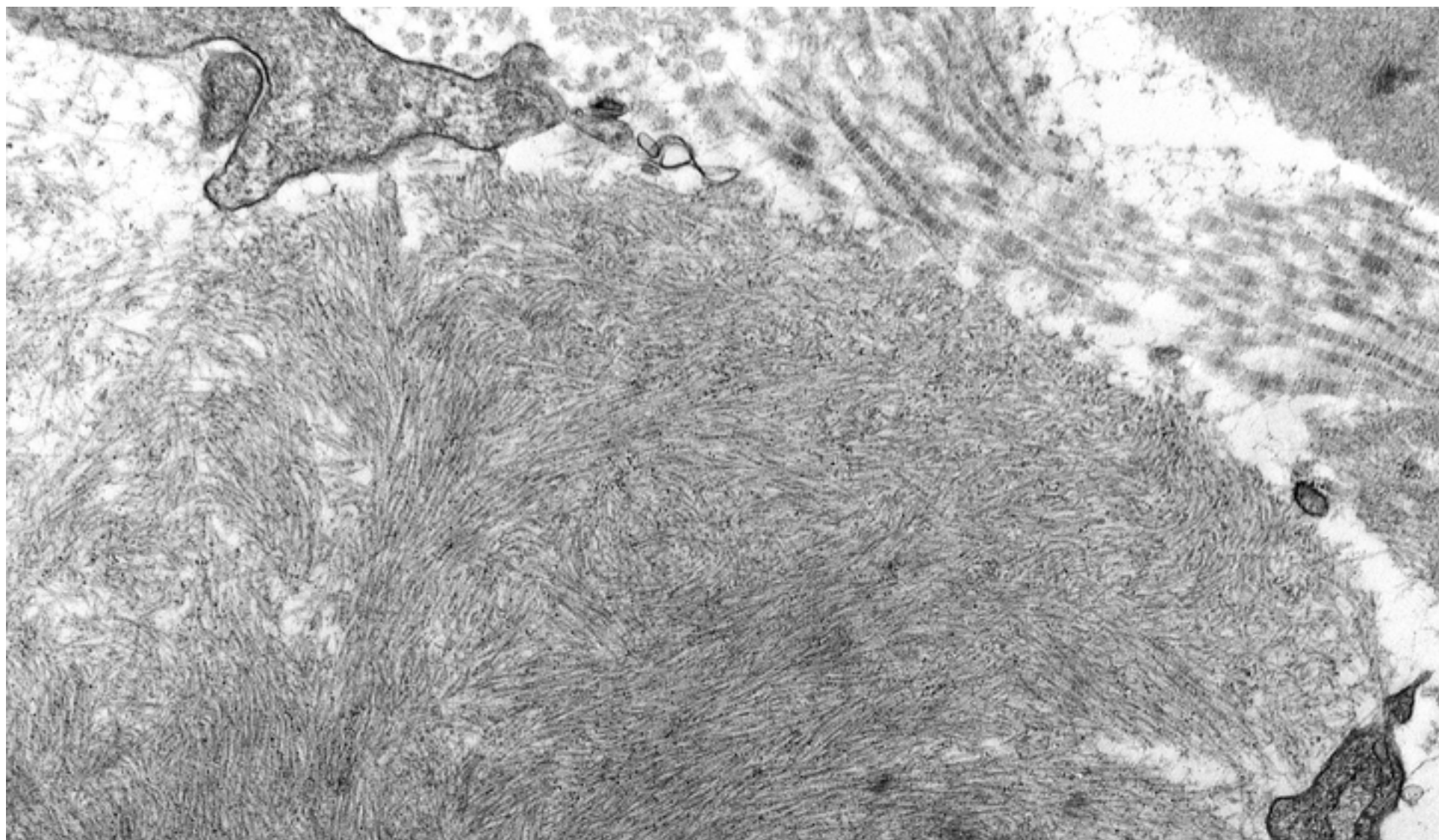


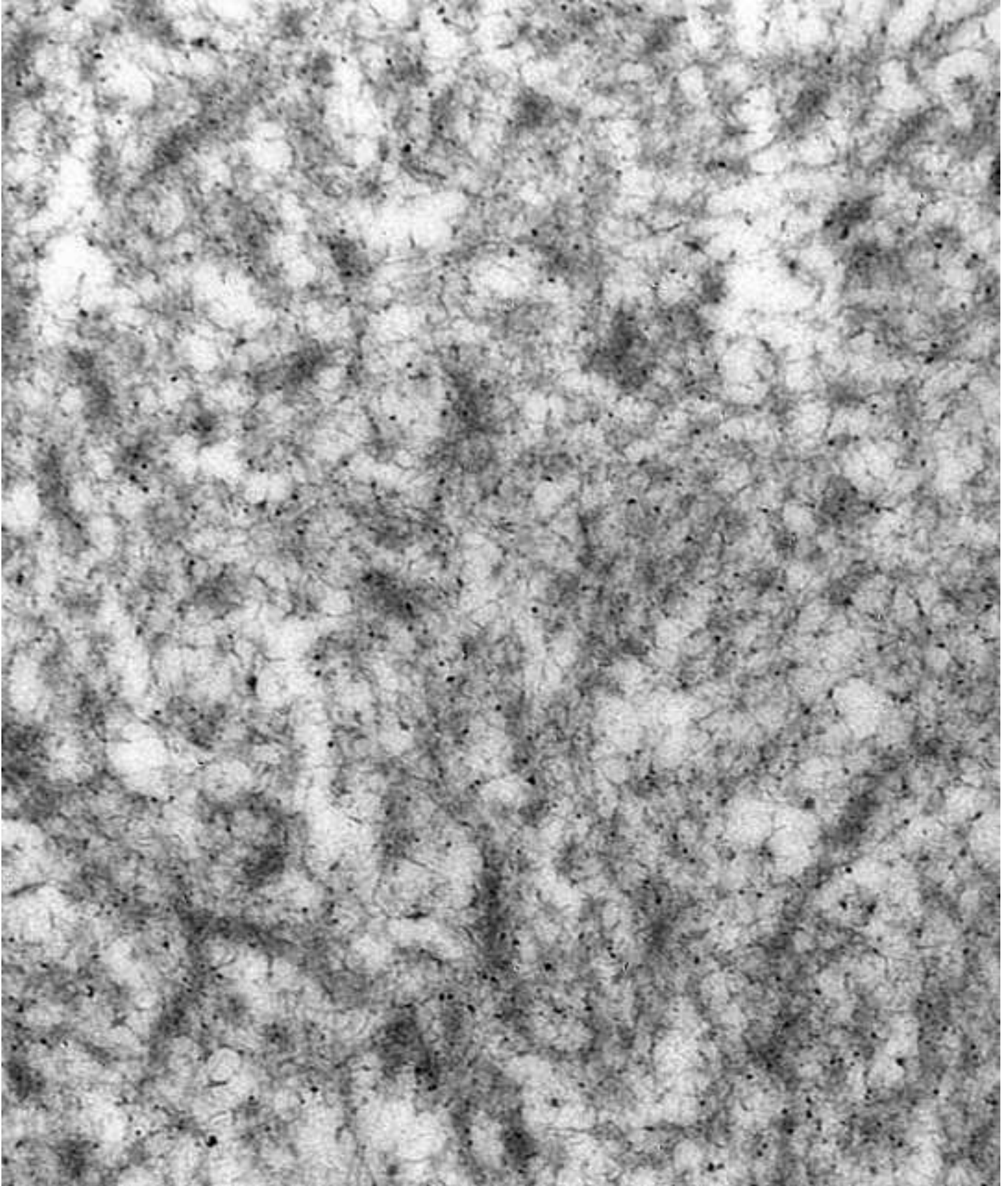
Figure 5B

[Click here to access/download;Figure;Figure 5B - corresponding cochlin HE.tif](#)

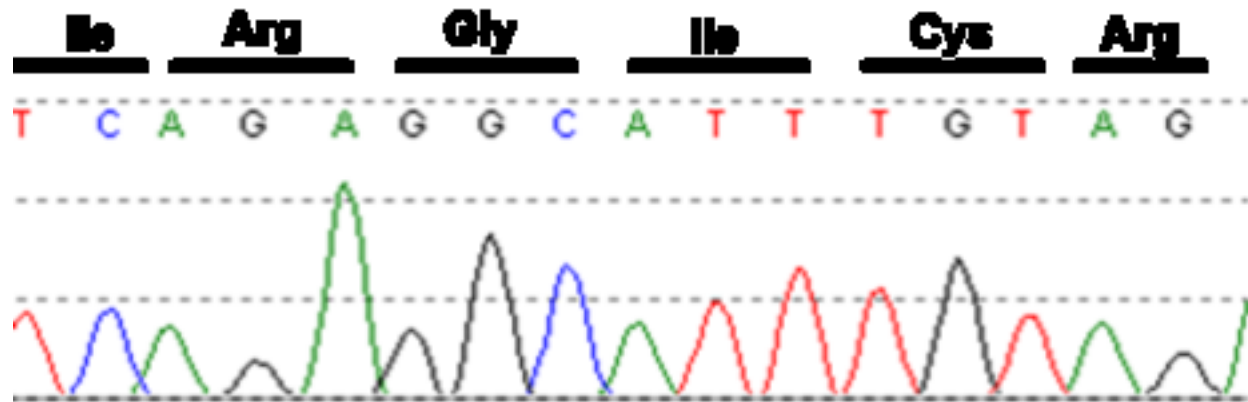




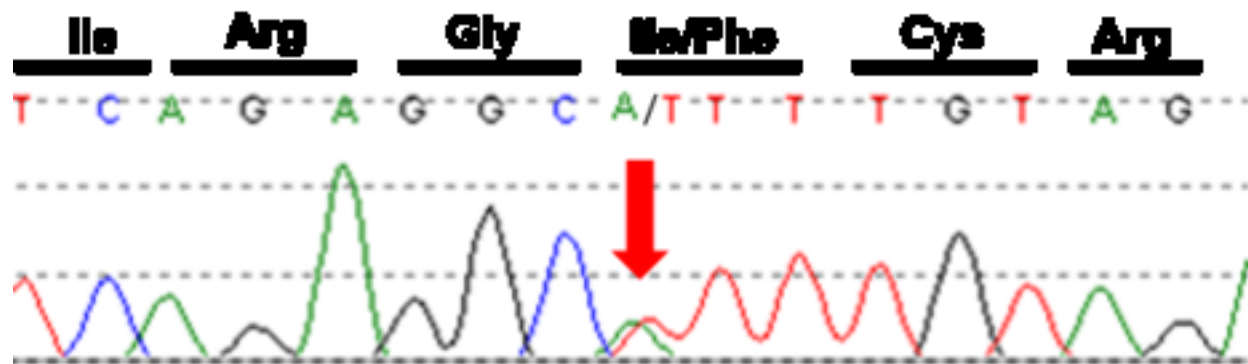




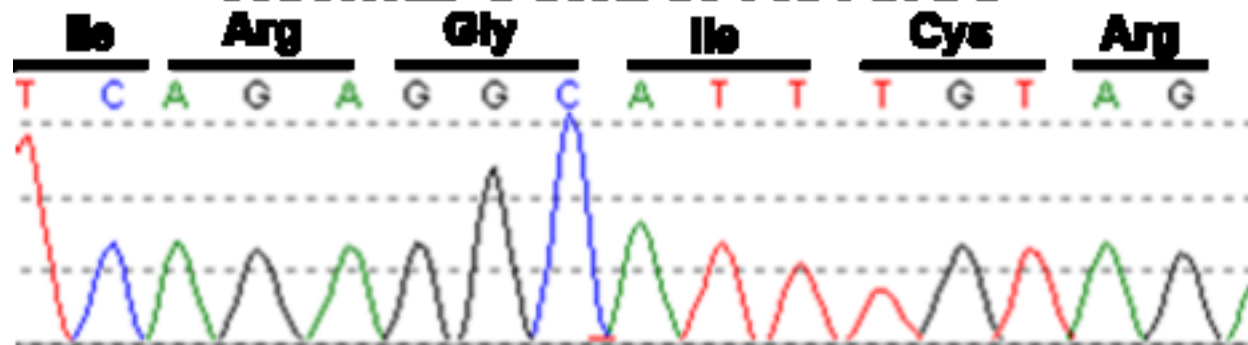
## Normal Control Forward



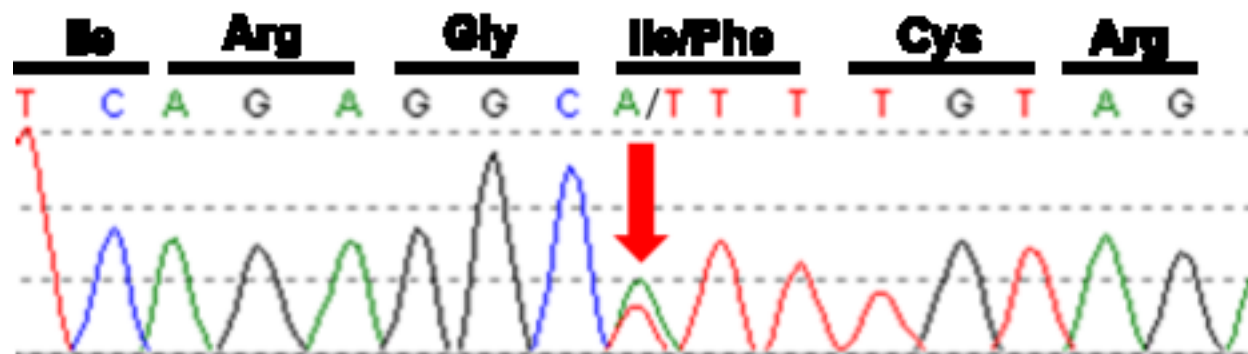
## Patient Forward



## Normal Control Reverse



## Patient Reverse



**Cochlin (550 aa) :**

MSAAWIPALGLGVCLLLLPGPAGSEGAAPIAITCFTRGLDIRKEKADVLCPPGGCPLEEF SVYGNIVYASV  
SSICGAAVHRGVISNSGGPVRVYSLPGRENYSSVDANGIQSQMLSRWSASFTVTKGKSSTQEATGQAVST  
AHPPTGKRLKKTPEKKTGNKDCKADIAFLIDGSFNIGQRRFNLQKNFVGKVALMLGIGTEGPHVGLVQAS  
EHPKIEFYLNFTSAKDVLFAIKEVGFRRGGNSNTGKALKHTAQKFFTVDAGVRKGI PKVVVVFIDGWPSD  
DIEEAGIVAREFGVNVFIVSVAKPIPEELGMVQDVTFVDKAVCRNNGFFSYHMPNWF GTTKYVKPLVQKL  
CTHEQMMCSKTCYNSVNIAFLIDGSSSVGDSNFRLMLEFVSNIAKTFEISDIGAKIAAVQFTYDQRTEFS  
FTDYSTKENVLAVIRNIRYMSGGTATGDAISFTVRNVFGPIRESPNKNFLVIVTDGQSYDDVQGPAAAAH  
DAGITIFSVGVAWAPLDDLKDMASKPKESHAF TREFTGLEPIVSDVIRGICRDFLESQQ