A retrospective study on the coexistence of hydatid cyst and aspergillosis

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Received 19 April 2007; received in revised form 5 August 2007; accepted 7 August 2007
Corresponding Editor: Craig Lee, Ottawa, Canada

Introduction

Hydatid cyst is a zoonotic disease most commonly caused by Echinococcus granulosus, while Echinococcus multilocularis is the most common type that causes pulmonary infection. Humans act as intermediate hosts and acquire the disease...
by ingesting the parasite eggs that are distributed into the environment via the feces of infected carnivores. Two of the major blood filtering organs, the liver and lungs, are most commonly involved, but infection may occur in any organ of the body. Turkey is in one of the endemic regions for echinococcosis, and the disease is particularly common in the southeast of Turkey, which is the locality of our institution.

Aspergillosis is a saprophytic fungal infection. There are more than 100 species of Aspergillus, and of these only approximately 20 are pathogenic; *Aspergillus fumigatus* is the most common cause of aspergillosis in humans. Aspergillus may cause allergic pulmonary aspergillosis, aspergilloma, and semi-invasive and invasive aspergillosis. Immune suppression and structural pulmonary defects may predispose to this infection.

There are only a few case reports in the English literature on the coexistence of aspergillosis and echinococcosis. This retrospective study was designed to evaluate the coexistence of aspergillosis and any other mycosis in hydatid cysts in this endemic area, and to discuss the probable clinical significance of this coexistence.

**Materials and methods**

The archives of the Department of Pathology, Gaziantep University Medical School, were searched for cases that were diagnosed as hydatid cyst between the years 1999 and 2004. One hundred cases were included in the study, and all hematoxylin–eosin (HE)-stained slides of these cases were retrospectively reevaluated under light microscopy by four pathologists independently. The medical records of the selected patients were checked; age and sex of the patients, localizations of hydatid cysts, and radiological findings were noted. Histochemically, Grocott’s methenamine-silver (GMS) and periodic acid-Schiff (PAS) were applied to the samples that were suspected to have Aspergillus co-infection, to confirm the diagnosis.

**Results**

Fifty-eight patients were female and 42 patients were male. Their ages ranged from 3 to 76 years, with a mean age of 34.6 years. The liver was the most common localization of the hydatid cyst (45%), followed by the lungs (42%), brain (6%), spleen (2%), gall bladder (2%), and soft tissue (2%). One case had multiple involvement, with one hydatid cyst in the liver and another in the spleen.

Aspergillus invading the hydatid cyst was found in two cases out of 100 and both of them were located in the lung (Figures 1–4). There was no co-infection with any other fungus in the remaining cases. None of the cases, including the two co-infected ones, were serologically evaluated for the presence of Aspergillus before or after the operations.

**Discussion**

Hydatid cyst is endemic in the Mediterranean countries, the Middle East, South America, the southern parts of Africa, Iceland, New Zealand, and Australia. Turkey is amongst these countries. The most common localization is the liver (50–70% of all cases), and the lungs are the second most common site of involvement (20–30%). In our study, 45% of the cases were located in the liver, while 42% were located in the lungs. Gender predilection and age distribution may vary...
Aspergillus is a saprophytic fungus. Immune deficiencies and structural deformities of the lung are predisposing conditions for aspergillosis. Aspergillus is recognized in histologic sections with its septate filaments branching at 40° angles. Aspergillus tends to invade the blood vessels, therefore the most common symptom in pulmonary aspergillosis is hemoptysis. However, killed hyphae of *Aspergillus fumigatus* have been shown to react with vascular endothelium resulting in vascular injury, so the presence of hemoptysis may not be an indicator of direct vascular invasion by the fungus. Also, a relationship between pulmonary aspergillosis and serum vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) levels has been shown.8 A correlation between serum VEGF levels and aspergillosis has been shown in a study, as mentioned above, but high VEGF levels may be seen in any inflammatory condition.8 Detection of Aspergillus galactomannan antigen (AGA) is valuable in invasive aspergillosis.12 This test is performed only if a suspicion exists, and AGA levels may not be helpful in non-invasive cases. Both of our cases were non-invasive and there was no clinical suspicion of aspergillosis; no serological tests were performed before the operation or after the diagnoses. Cytopathologic examination of cyst aspirate may be effective where there is no contraindication for aspiration.5 As a result of the limited chance of detecting the coexistence of these two entities before histopathologic examination of the resected materials, preplanned adequate management may not be possible before operation. Light microscopic evaluation of the excised hydatid cysts is ‘dull’ work for the pathologists working in endemic areas, and in sending the specimen to the laboratory, the surgeons undertaking this routine procedure ‘already know’ what will be written in the pathology report. But these specimens may contain potential threats to the patients, and traps for the physicians. Adequate sampling of the excised specimen and careful evaluation of the HE-stained sections is essential.

Since reports appearing in the literature are very few in number and are only sporadic case reports, there are no reliable data on the optimum management of these patients. Our patients were immunocompetent and no post-operative complication or dissemination of either infection occurred. Both of the cysts were intact before surgery and the surgical resections were carried out successfully without rupturing the hydatid cysts. So we can claim that aspergillosis was limited to the cysts, and surgical resection was curative both for hydatid cysts and aspergillosis. However, in cases with ruptured cysts, especially in immunocompromised patients, the patient may be at risk of further Aspergillus infection, which may even advance to the invasive form.4 It is known that invasive aspergillosis is one of the major causes of death in bone marrow transplantation and leukemia patients.7 Although it is rare, this coexistence may be life-threatening, particularly in patients with immune suppressing diseases, and close follow-up and prophylactic chemotherapy for aspergillosis may be useful to prevent further complications.

**Conflict of interest:** No conflict of interest to declare.

**References**