SHORT REPORT

Progressive Acute Abdominal Aortic Syndrome

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Introduction

Vilacosta and associates have recently described the pathology of a new cardiovascular syndrome, acute aortic syndrome. This syndrome embraces a heterogeneous group of patients with a similar clinical profile that includes penetrating atherosclerotic aortic ulcer, intramural aortic haematoma, and classic aortic dissection. The authors describe progressive acute abdominal aortic syndrome, in which the penetration of the ulcer occurred at the dorsal end of the abdominal aorta and progressed rapidly and cranially.

Case Report

A 64-year-old man with back pain was referred to our department. He had undergone abdominal computed tomography (CT) scans because of epigastric pain nearly two months earlier, and a mass dorsal to the normal-calibre abdominal aorta had been retrospectively diagnosed (Fig. 1, upper panel). The mass had been seen on only one slice of the scans. Repeated CT scans when his back pain started revealed that the mass had expanded cranially and was at least 2 cm in diameter (Fig. 1, lower panel). The mass was adjacent to the aorta but did not fill with contrast. The patient was diagnosed as having a thrombosed pseudoaneurysm preoperatively, and semiurgent surgery was performed because of rapid expansion of the aneurysm and the back pain. At operation, there was neither a defect of the posterior aortic wall nor a mural thrombus but the posterior wall was remarkably thickened. The diseased aorta was successfully replaced with a tube graft. Histopathological examination of the thickened wall failed to show a false aneurysm so the postoperative diagnosis was considered to be rupture of an atherosclerotic plaque. The patient has complained of no back pain postoperatively and is doing well 3 months after the operation.

Discussion

Although rupture of a normal-calibre aorta is usually caused by trauma, dissection, infection or steroid use, spontaneous perforation of the nonaneurysmal atherosclerotic aorta, i.e. acute aortic syndrome, has rarely been described. Penetrating atherosclerotic aortic ulcer, which Stanson and colleagues have described, is a distinct clinico-pathological entity which most commonly involves the thoracic aorta. According to Goldstein and co-workers’ review in 1997, nine cases of atraumatic spontaneous rupture in the setting of nonaneurysmal, noninfected abdominal aorta have been found. In acute aortic syndrome, the aortic ulcer possibly progresses to intramural haematoma or classic dissection. In the present case, the penetrating atherosclerotic ulcer of the dorsal abdominal aorta probably progressed cranially because of the limited space between the aorta and the lumbar vertebrae, and the progression was extremely rapid, 2 cm cranially in only 50 days, with back pain. To our knowledge, this progressive pattern in acute aortic syndrome has not previously been described. The absence of aneurysmal dilatation or an inflammatory process suggests that the contained aortic rupture may have resulted from transmural plaque fracture through an area of...
atheromatous thinning or, alternatively, from a pene-
trating ulcer which evolved over the period of 1 month
into transmural rupture. Although the natural history
of acute aortic syndrome has not been clearly defined,
the present case suggests that penetrating ather-
 sclerotic aortic ulcer can progress over a short period.
To avoid transmural aortic rupture in patients with
acute aortic syndrome, careful follow-up, such as
repeated CT scanning, is recommended, and surgical
intervention should be performed when the penetrat-
ing atherosclerotic ulcer is seen to progress.

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