Intimal sarcoma of the left atrium – A rare form of mitral valve obstruction

Sarcoma da íntima da aurícula esquerda – uma forma rara de obstrução valvular mitral

Glória Abreu a,∗, Alberto Salgado a, Nuno Bettencourt a,b, Nuno Salomé a, João Ferreira c, Susana Guimarães d

a Serviço de Cardiologia, Hospital de Braga, Braga, Portugal
b Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
c Serviço de Cirurgia Cardiotorácica, Centro Hospital de São João, Porto, Portugal
d Serviço de Anatomia Patológica, Centro Hospitalar de São João, Porto, Portugal

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A 70-year-old woman was referred to the emergency department due to mild effort dyspnea, weight loss and night sweats. Transthoracic and transesophageal echocardiography revealed dilated left atrium with an extensive multilobulated mass infiltrating the left atrial posterolateral wall. It prolapsed through the mitral valve during diastole, resulting in elevated mean and peak pressure gradients (8 mmHg and 25 mmHg, respectively [Panels A–C]). Coronary angiography revealed a highly vascularized mass (Panel D, Video 1). Cardiac magnetic resonance (CMR) evidenced the full extension of the mass – measuring 10 cm – in relation to the left atrial posterolateral wall. It extended to both inferior pulmonary veins and revealed tissue characteristics in T1- (isointense) and T2-weighted (hyperintense) images. No contrast uptake was found during first-pass perfusion, but progressive and heterogeneous uptake was observed in the early and late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) images, with a low signal intensity central area (Panels E–G, Video 2 and 3). Computed tomography (CT) staging was negative for metastases. The patient was referred for surgery, but only partial resection was possible (Panel H). Histopathology revealed a malignant neoplasm, with high cellularity, which was predominantly undifferentiated and pleomorphic, with fusiform and epithelioid cells; necrosis areas and a high mitotic index (Panel I); vimentin (Panel J) and nuclear multifocal MDM2 expression (Panel K). These findings are consistent with intimal sarcoma. The patient was not considered to be a candidate for chemotherapy due to the tumor characteristics. One month later, congestive symptoms relapsed. A CT scan confirmed mass growth and pulmonary vein invasion (Panel L). The patient died within a month (Figure 1).

Primary cardiac tumors are rare (incidence <0.03%) and only one quarter is malignant. Intimal sarcomas are mesenchymal tumors and are more commonly encountered in great vessels, so the heart is rarely involved. To our knowledge, only eight cases have been reported to date. These tumors are locally aggressive and proliferate rapidly. Although surgical excision with tumor-free margins is the main treatment, complete surgical excision may often not be possible. The overall prognosis is poor, with a median survival of 3 to 12 months. The effectiveness of chemotherapy
and radiotherapy is the subject of debate. In most cases, the cause of death is local tumor enlargement and recurrence.

Echocardiographic method of choice for cardiac tumors (sensitivity 93.3-96%) and is useful for differentiating malignant neoplasms from benign ones. However, due to a limited field of view, the tumor burden may remain underdiagnosed. CMR, which offers multiplanar imaging without restrictions on the field of view, enables the tumor to be accurately located, the extent of involvement to be assessed and the functional impact of the lesion and tissue characterization to be evaluated. In this case, pulmonary vein involvement, broad-based attachment, size greater than 5 cm, ill-defined margins, heterogeneous signal on T1-and T2-weighted images and heterogeneous LGE all led to suspicion of malignancy. However, CMR features are non-specific, with intermediate T1 and high T2 signal intensities and varying amounts of first-pass uptake and LGE. An accurate diagnosis could only be made by histopathology.

In this rare case of mitral valve obstruction, multimodal imaging was crucial to guide diagnosis and treatment.

Conflicts of interest
The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.repc.2017.03.013.