Thymic pathology and cardiac myxomas: Coincidence or a closer relationship?

Sotirios D. Moraitis, Apostolos C. Agrafiotis, Dimitrios Pappas, Chrysovalantis Pothitakis, Maria Stergianni, Ioannis Koukis

1 Joint Corps Armed Forces Cardiac Surgery Department, 401 Hellenic Army Hospital, Athens, Greece
2 Department of Thoracic Surgery, Tenon University Hospital, Paris, France
3 Department of Pathology, 401 Hellenic Army Hospital, Athens, Greece

Abstract

Myxomas are the most common benign cardiac tumors and are located more frequently in the left atrium. In the literature there are cases describing the coexistence of thymic tumors and cardiac myxomas. In the case reported herein, during the resection of a cardiac myxoma, an enlarged thymus gland was encountered and resected. The histological exam revealed a thymic hyperplasia. The aim of this case study is to investigate the relationship between cardiac myxomas and thymic pathology, through a review of the literature, and to suggest further workup of the anterior mediastinum before surgical resection of a myxoma.

Introduction

The incidence of primary cardiac tumors is estimated to be between 0.002% and 0.19% [1]. Myxomas are the most common benign cardiac tumors and are located more frequently in the left atrium, in relation to the fossa ovalis [1,2]. Their histogenesis is not well known [2].

In the literature there are cases describing the coexistence of thymic tumors and cardiac myxomas [3,5]. In the case reported herein, during the resection of a cardiac myxoma, an enlarged thymus gland was encountered and resected. The histological exam revealed a thymic hyperplasia. The aim of this case study is to assess the need of conducting further studies in order to identify a common histological pathway between thymic lesions and cardiac myxomas. The diagnosis of a cardiac myxoma could justify a further workup of the anterior mediastinum in order not to overlook a lesion of thymic origin.

Case Report

A 47-year-old female patient, with unremarkable medical history, underwent a routine transthoracic cardiac ultrasonography. A round mass located in the left atrium was discovered and this finding was highly suggestive of a cardiac myxoma (Figure 1). The overall systolic function was normal and there was no sign of valvular disease. A coronary angiography revealed no pathology. The patient was scheduled for the resection of the mass through a median sternotomy. The EuroSCORE I was 2.08% and the EuroSCORE II 0.84%. Intraoperatively, an enlarged thymus gland was discovered without any evidence of tumor. A total thymectomy was performed (Figure 2). Cardiopulmonary bypass was established under bicaval cannulation. Through transatrial approach, the left atrium was opened at the fossa ovalis. A 5-cm sessile mass was found attached to the fossa ovalis and the posterolateral wall of the left atrium (Figure 2). The mass was resected, the left atrial wall was closed and the interatrial septum was repaired by an autologous pericardial patch (Figure 2). The patient was successfully weaned from the cardiopulmonary bypass. There was no sonographic sign of mitral valve leak. The patient spent the first postoperative day on the ICU. Postoperatively, she presented a Mobitz II A-V block that necessitated the implantation of a permanent pacemaker. The patient was discharged on the 20th postoperative day. The histological examination confirmed the hypothesis of a cardiac myxoma (Figure 3). As far as the enlarged thymus is concerned there was a thymic hyperplasia (12 x 5 x 1.5 cm) without any findings suggesting a tumoral pathology (Figure 3).

Discussion

Cardiac myxomas have a good prognosis and a low surgical mortality rate [1]. Clinical symptoms may vary and depend on the size and location of the tumor (embolization, arrhythmias and hemodynamic disturbances) [1,5]. In the present case report the patient was asymptomatic probably due to the large implantation base of the tumor in the left atrial wall, rendering it motionless and thus preventing obstruction of the leaflets of the mitral valve. Transthoracic cardiac ultrasound is the mainstay imaging technique for their detection but cardiac MRI has become widely accepted as a primary technique in the workup of cardiac tumors [1]. The coexistence of multiple cardiac myxomas, pig-

E-mail: apostolos.agrafiotis@aphp.fr

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Case Report

Moyomas are supposed to originate from subendothelial vasoformative cells, or from primitive cells which are located in the fossa ovalis and surrounding endocardium, known as primitive multipotential mesenchymal cells or “cardiac reserve” cells [2]. However, their existence is not clearly demonstrated. Miller et al. adopt the same theory but they describe in addition the phenomenon of heterotopias in order to explain the presence of a thymoma within a cardiac myxoma [4].

There are also other case reports suggesting a close relationship between cardiac myxomas and thymic pathology, but without clear evidence of a common histological pathway. Futami et al. described a mediastinal mass that was suspected to be a myxoma originating from the right atrium. A preoperative transvenous catheter biopsy was suggestive of myxoma but finally the lesion was proved to be a thymoma with caval and atrial invasion [3]. Seemann and Brenner reported the coexistence of a right atrial myxoma with bilateral pulmonary tumor emboli and a benign thymoma [5]. In the case reported herein a thymic hyperplasia was a fortuitous intraoperative finding during a scheduled resection of a cardiac myxoma. Certainly, this coexistence could be simply a coincidence, but it should not exclude a closer relationship between thymic pathology and cardiac myxomas.

Conclusions

The case reported herein and the review of the literature should stimulate the conduction of further studies in order to identify a common histological pathway between thymic lesions and cardiac myxomas.
myxomas. The diagnosis of a cardiac myxoma could justify a further workup of the anterior mediastinum, probably a computed tomography with contrast injection, in order not to overlook a lesion of thymic origin.

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