Reoperation for ascending aorta aneurysm after double valve replacement in a Takayasu’s aortitis patient: a case report

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Abstract

Takayasu’s aortitis (TA) is a complicated disease. Surgical treatment, especially reoperation, can be difficult. Here, we report a case of reoperation for TA, which presented with three major complications (aortic aneurysm, valve detachment, and fistula) 3 years after surgical treatment. During the surgery, the aortic valve was reconsolidated and fixed to the mitral valve, the fistula was then repaired, and the aortic root was replaced with woven graft. Following an uncomplicated postoperative event, the patient was discharged at 24 days postoperatively. Follow-up echocardiography at 2 years showed no perivalvular leakage. In such reoperative cases, when double valve replacement is required, it may be better to proactively reconstruct the structure of the central fibrous body.

Keywords

Reoperation • Aorta aneurysm • Takayasu’s aortitis • Case report

Introduction

Takayasu’s aortitis (TA) is a chronic systemic vasculitis of unknown origin. It often involves the aorta, its major branches, and the aortic valve. Diagnosis of the disease is mainly based on pathological findings.1 Surgical treatment such as valve replacement is occasionally required when cardiovascular symptoms occur. The most serious complications after valve replacement in TA are prosthetic valve detachment2 and aortic root aneurysm.3 Here, we present a surgical case of TA with valve detachment, aortic root aneurysm, and aorta–left ventricular and aorta–left atrium fistula after previous double valve replacement (DVR).

Case

This article was approved by the ethics committee of Guangdong General Hospital, and written informed consent was obtained from the patient.

A 29-year-old male patient was admitted for tachypnoea and exertional palpitations on 21 October 2014. He had previously undergone DVR with an ATS aortic mechanical valve of size 25 mm and an ATS mitral mechanical valve for aortic and mitral regurgitation of size 29 mm on 4 January 2011. At that time, the aortic root was slightly dilated to a diameter of about 35 mm. After operation, the patient was diagnosed with TA based on intraoperative observation and postoperative pathologic examination (Figure 1). The postoperative course was uneventful, and the patient was asymptomatic for 3 years. Before the initial operation, the patient had no previous hospitalizations and

Learning point

• Reconstructing the central fibrous body and reducing the relative movement of the aortic valve may benefit Takayasu’s aortitis patients requiring valve replacement.
history of medical complications. He did not take any oral corticosteroids, and C-reactive protein (CRP) was not monitored. Echocardiography was undertaken once every 6 months. The patient unexpectedly experienced tachypnoea and exertional palpitations 3 years after the procedure. Physical examination revealed systolic murmurs at the cardiac apex. Heart rate was 80 b.p.m., respiratory rate was 20 breaths/min, and blood pressure was 121/51 mmHg. A crisp metallic A2 and loud P2 was noted during auscultation. Breaths sounded clear, and no rale was noted. Echocardiography showed large movement of the mechanical aortic valve (Figure 2A). Thus, the patient was readmitted to the hospital for further examination. Laboratory examination showed a white blood cell count of 7.8 $\times$ 10$^9$/L (with standard range of 4–10 $\times$ 10$^9$/L), erythrocyte sedimentation rate of 28 mm/h, and CRP of 23.3 mg/L (with standard range of 0–15 mm/h and 0.068–8.2 mg/L respectively). Other laboratory results were within normal limits. Transoesophageal echocardiography showed severe detachment of the aortic valve and fistula from the aortic root to both the left ventricle and the left atrium (Figure 2B). Computed tomography showed aneurysmal dilation of the aortic root to a diameter of 64 mm (Figure 3A and B). After evaluation, we diagnosed this patient with (i) TA, (ii) aortic aneurysm, (iii) aortic valve detachment, (iv) aortic fistula, and (v) previous DVR.

**Timeline**

| Time       | Event                                             |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 4/1/2011   | First surgery-DVR, and TA was diagnosed           |
| 1/5/2014   | Polypnea and exertional palpitations occurred     |
| 9/6/2014   | Echocardiography detected detachment of the aortic valve |
| 28/8/2014  | CT found aortic root dilation                     |
| 5/11/2014  | Reoperation                                       |
| 29/11/2014 | Discharge                                         |
| 25/5/2017  | Latest follow-up echocardiography                |

On 5 November 2014, we reoperated through a median sternotomy. Cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) was established through the femoral artery and axillary artery. The aneurysm was resected close to the annulus. The mechanical aortic valve was almost completely detached; however, the valve leaflet was intact. Thus, we reconsolidated the aortic valve to the annulus using continuous 4-0 Prolene suture and repaired the fistula of the aorta–left ventricular and aorta–left atrium with a patch of artificial pericardium. A woven graft of size 28 mm (MAQUET) was implanted and the coronary arteries were anastomosed to the graft. When we tried to take the patient off CPB, unexpected and severe bleeding occurred in the margin of the repaired fistula. After restarting CPB, we re-exposed the fistula by opening the patch that was placed over the fistula of the aorta–left atrium. We then fixed the aortic valve to the mitral valve using 3-0 Prolene through the fistula followed by repair and reinforcement of the patches using 4-0 Prolene. The aortic root–right atrial shunt was performed by covering the woven graft with the remaining aortic wall and making a shunt to the right atrium. Finally, the patient was weaned from CPB. Aortic cross-clamp time was 373 min, and CPB time was 581 min.

The postoperative course was uneventful. Postoperative haemostatics, vasoactive agent (dopamine, epinephrine, etc.), steroids, and antibiotics were routinely used. After a hospital stay of 24 days, the patient was discharged. Echocardiography before discharge showed only slight malfunction of the medial leaflet of the mitral valve and no perivalvular leakage. The patient took oral corticosteroids (from 30 mg/day down to 10 mg/day) for 6 months postoperatively. Follow-up echocardiography at 3 months, 1 year, and 2 years showed only moderate tricuspid regurgitation and the medial leaflet malfunction (Figure 4).

**Discussion**

Takayasu’s aortitis is an autoimmune vasculitis affecting medium and large arteries. Surgical intervention is required in some cases, and good surgical outcome has been obtained. However, postoperative complications such as perivalvular leakage, valve...
detachment, and aneurysm formation are relatively common because of extensive and severe lesions as well as fragile and inflamed tissue encountered during the procedure.\textsuperscript{6,7} Reoperations for valve detachments and aneurysm formation have been reported.\textsuperscript{8} In addition, fistulation,\textsuperscript{9} a rare complication, has also been documented in TA. We have presented a case of reoperation for TA that presented with all of these complications, making it a notable and complex procedure.

In this case, the patient refused to take steroid after the first surgery, which might be a factor contributing to the disease progression. Thus, we instructed the patient to take steroid for 6 months after he was discharged (the second time) just for safety. However, there is a
Postoperative treatment was uneventful. The echocardiography before discharge showed only slight malfunction of the mitral valve medial leaflet, which could be caused by the suture between the aortic valve and the mitral valve. Echocardiography 2 years after the surgery showed only moderate tricuspid regurgitation and the medial leaflet malfunction, which is the result of the aortic root–right atrial shunt and reconstruction of the central fibrous body. Although a report by Rosero et al. described a case of long-term shunt patency with detrimental consequences, in our case, the tricuspid regurgitation is moderate (about 1.2 cm²), and the patient has not developed any symptoms. We believe that thorough haemostasis in the surgery and precise management of the size of the shunt is very important. Takayasu’s aortitis is a progressive disease, and the diagnosis of disease activity is based on clinical and imaging features. In this case, the patient developed symptoms and echocardiography detected an abnormality just 6 months after the follow-up. Therefore, more rigorous follow-up should be employed in TA patients. Surgical intervention should be performed in a timely manner when clinical symptoms develop or severe imaging abnormality is detected.

Similar reoperations in TA patients have been reported. However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first report of an aorta–left ventricle and aorta–left atrium fistula combined aneurysm and prosthetic valve detachment in a TA patient.

Because of the retrospective nature of this case report and, in particular, the long follow-up of nearly 3 years, it is difficult to obtain valuable patient perspective. In addition, we believe the most valuable information from this case lies in the treatment itself, particularly in the emergency treatment and planning that occurred intraoperatively.

**Conclusion**

We successfully treated a case of aortic aneurysm combined with aortic valve detachment and aortic fistula after previous DVR in TA patient. The teaching points of this case were: (i) the two key procedures in this operation, i.e. reconstruction of the central fibrous body and the shunt of aortic root–right atrial shunt; (ii) because of the fragility of the tissue in TA patients, the surgical operation must be meticulous to ensure as little tension on the suture line as possible; (iii) for DVR operations in TA patients, proactively fixing the aortic valve to the mitral valve might be beneficial; (iv) imaging follow-up should be performed on a more regular basis in TA patients; and (v) even in such a challenging and complex case, surgery is still the feasible and the preferred option.

**Supplementary material**

Supplementary material is available at *European Heart Journal - Case Reports* online.

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**Consent:** The author/s confirm that written consent for submission and publication of this case report including image(s) and associated text has been obtained from the patient in line with COPE guidance.

**Conflict of interest:** none declared.

**Author Contributions:** X.F. was the attending doctor in charge of surgery and the treatment process, the leading surgeon in the operation and was also involved in supervision and revising the article. J.H. was the primary author for writing and revising this article. J.Z. was the senior consultant who helped in planning the therapy and assisted in the operation. J.P. was the co-author of this article who helped collecting data and editing the article. X.F. and J.Z. holds the overall responsibility.

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