Microsurgery for intradural epidermoid cyst at cauda equina level in a 9-year-old child: A case report

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

\textbf{Introduction and importance:} Epidermoid cysts are rare benign tumors. Here, we present a case of spontaneous intradural epidermoid cyst at cauda equina level in a 9-year-old patient, which we believed the first case to be reported in Vietnam.

\textbf{Case presentation:} A 9-year-old boy presented with 4 months of spontaneous left lower extremity muscle weakness and paresthesia. The MRI images suggested the diagnosis of intradural epidermoid cyst at cauda equina level. The patient underwent L5–S1 laminectomy and durotomy for tumor resection. The histology confirmed the diagnosis of epidermoid cyst. Post-operative images demonstrated total cyst removal.

\textbf{Clinical discussion:} The epidemiology, presentation and diagnosis and strategy of treatments as well as their outcomes were discussed.

\textbf{Conclusion:} Diagnosis of spinal epidermoid cyst is often delayed for its obscure presentation. Microsurgical dissection along with intra-operative mobile C-Arms enable total tumor resection while preserving spinal stability and neurological function. Follow-up with post-operative magnetic resonance imaging and tumor marker are helpful.

1. \textbf{Introduction and importance}

Epidermoid cysts are rare benign tumors. It made up for less than 1\% of all intraspinal tumors \cite{1}. Since the first intramedullary epidermoid cyst case reported by Chiari in 1883, there are more than 100 cases published \cite{2}. Etiology of spinal epidermoid cyst may be spontaneous or iatrogenic \cite{2}. During the fetal period, the epidermal elements integrate into deeper tissue led to spontaneous epidermoid cyst. Iatrogenic spinal epidermoid cysts following lumbar puncture have been reported in the literature \cite{3}. The diagnosis and treatment of intraspinal epidermoid cyst are often delayed, for its slow growth and obscure clinical manifestations \cite{1}.

2. \textbf{Case presentation}

We report an original case of a 9-year-old. He presented with 4 months of spontaneous left lower extremity muscle weakness and paresthesia. His parents denied any history of trauma, lumbar puncture or previous surgery related to the spine. Past medical history revealed no drug use. No family history was observed.

On physical examination, he had no back pain. He had left dorsiflexion and plantarflexion weakness with muscle strength of 4/5 \cite{4,5}, difficulty walking on his left heel or on his left toes, Achilles tendon hyporeflexia, decreased pin/touch appreciation in the L5–S1 dermatomes \cite{5}. No muscle atrophy, no evidence of spinal dysraphism was observed.

The magnetic resonance imaging of the lumbosacral spine showed a 26 × 12 mm well-circumscribed intradural mass at the L5–S1 level,
which was slightly hyperintense on T1, hetero-intense on T2 and STIR, and no perilesional edema (Fig. 1). The findings were coherent with a diagnosis of intradural epidermoid cyst at the cauda equina level [6], resulting in L5–S1 nerve roots compression.

The patient was operated on with posterior lumbar laminectomy for tumor removal with affirmation from the patient and his parents. We utilized intra-operation imaging with mobile C-Arm to identify the accurate level of the tumor and skin incision. We performed a laminectomy and then, a durotomy at the level of L5–S1. The lesion capsule was well-defined and closely attached to surrounding nerve roots and vessels of the cauda equina region. Its content was pearly, soft, and friable. The cyst with its capsule was meticulously dissected and totally removed under the microscope. The surrounding nerve roots and vessels were preserved. The procedure was performed by Dr. H.D.D. and his team.

Macroscopically, a well circumscribed and unilocular soft cyst with friable contents was observed (Fig. 2). The histopathology showed a fibrous capsule with stratified squamous epithelium supported by an outer layer of collagenous tissue, without any skin appendages (Fig. 3). These findings were coherent with an epidermoid cyst [6].

Post-operation, the patient was treated with antibiotics and rehabilitation. After 5 days, he was dismissed from the hospital. On 1-month and 2-month follow-up, the neurological deficits subsided. The patient was able to walk steadily, he also denied any numbness or tingling in his lower extremities. The 2-month post-operative imaging demonstrated a complete resection of the tumor on MRI images (Fig. 4) [7] [8]. The CA 19-9 level 2-month post-operative was 12.25 U/ml which lines in normal interval [9].

This paper has been reported in line with the SCARE 2020 criteria [10].

3. Clinical discussion

Congenital epidermoid cysts are rare. Together with its slow growth and vague clinical manifestations, its diagnoses were often delayed [11] [8]. Our patient had been symptomatic for 4 months, with his gait were affected by weakness and paresthesia in his left lower extremity. However, there was no indication for his lumbosacral MRI scan until in our hospital.

Epidermoid cysts are usually iso- or slightly hyperintense compared with CSF in T1- and T2- weighted images, present of slight heterogeneity in signal intensity was possible. They restrict on DWI, rarely suppress on FLAIR, and may peripherally enhance [12]. In our case, MRI demonstrates a typical pattern of epidermoid cysts, which is an intradural well-circumscribed mass, slightly hyperintense in T1-weighted images, hetero-intense in T2-weighted and FLAIR images.

Diagnosis of an epidermoid cyst could be based on macroscopic inspection [8]. Histologically, epidermoid cysts are lined by stratified squamous epithelium braced up by a layer of collagenous tissue; progressive shedding of keratin from epithelial cells toward the interior of the cyst produces a soft white and friable material content. Unlike dermoid cysts, there are no skin appendages in epidermoid cysts. [8]

The ideal treatment of intradural epidermoid cyst is gross total resection [13]. Emptying of the cyst content is normally performed with ease, but the thin tumor capsule is usually tightly adherent to the surrounding nerve roots and vessels. Its complete resection can cause neurological deficits [8]. On the contrary, residual capsules might lead to the recurrence of the tumor [14] [7]. In our case report, microsurgical dissection of the capsule allowed us to accomplish total resection without compromising neurological functions.

With the utilization of mobile C-Arms intra-operative imaging, we
accurately decided the level L5–S1 for skin incision, laminectomy and durotomy, which facilitated us in the process of tumor resection. Excessive laminectomy leads to instability of the spine and requires fusion instrument [15] [16], which were complicated in our 9-year-old child case. Planned 3 or more levels of laminectomy or facetectomy equal or higher than 50% of the width of the joint on either side or both sides are decision criteria in favor for spinal fusion [17]. In our case, the patient has no spinal deformity pre-operatively, a L5–S1 laminectomy without facetectomy was performed intra-operation, and patient denies any back pain at one-month and two-months follow-up.

Postoperative follow-up mainly based on MRI images [9,13]. In our cases, MRI images show complete removal of the tumor, including in DWI images [8]. However, some reports have demonstrated the correlation between epidermoid cyst and the level of CA 19-9 [9]. Our patient’s CA 19-9 level at two-month follow-up was inside normal interval.

4. Conclusion

Diagnosis of spinal epidermoid cyst is often delayed for its obscure presentation. Microsurgical dissection along with intra-operative mobile C-Arms enables total tumor resection while preserving spinal stability and neurological function. Follow-up with post-operative magnetic resonance imaging and tumor marker are helpful.

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Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Hanoi Medical University. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declarations of Helsinki.

Consent

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient and his parents for publication of this case report and accompanying images. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editor-in-Chief of this journal on request.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ha Dai Duong: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation,
Hung Thanh Chu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.
Anh Hoang Pham: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization.
Tam Duc Le: Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.
Dung Tuan Pham: Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.
He Van Dong: Conceptualization, Resources, Supervision.

Research registration (for case reports detailing a new surgical technique or new equipment/technology)
Not applied. This was not a first time a new surgical technique or new equipment/technology was used.

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Declaration of competing interest
The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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