Endovascular closure of an arteriovenous graft for dialysis-associated steal syndrome of lower extremity

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ABSTRACT

Steal syndrome causing limb ischemia is a rare but important complication of arteriovenous fistulas. When surgical or endovascular means to resolve ischemia are inconclusive, closure of the fistula becomes required. Our case presented with lower extremity ischemia resulting from an arteriovenous fistula graft. We present the successful endovascular closure of the lower extremity graft using the Amplatzer Vascular Plug.

Keywords: Arteriovenous fistula; dialysis-associated steal syndrome; endovascular.

Dialysis-associated steal syndrome (DASS) is a complication of arteriovenous fistulas (AVF) [1]. Although the upper extremity veins are prioritized in dialysis access, patients with exhausted options can require lower extremity AVF, which makes DASS in the legs a rare but important complication.

The Amplatzer Vascular Plug (St. Jude Medical, St. Paul, MN) is utilized for endovascular closure of AVF and the success of this intervention for upper extremities are reported in the literature [2, 3]. We report a successful endovascular closure of a lower extremity AVF with a graft between the femoral artery and vein due to DASS of the lower extremity of a patient with a high surgical risk.

CASE REPORT

A 71-year-old female patient who had been operated for an AV fistula with a synthetic graft between the left femoral artery and vein 2 months prior presented with pain of the left lower extremity. Inspection revealed ischemic ulcers on the left foot, a cold, and cyanotic left leg. The posterior tibial artery pulse was non-palpable and the dorsalis pedis artery had a biphasic waveform. The patient had a history of coronary artery bypass 10 years ago using the left radial artery. At the different institution, where the fistula operation had been performed, the right arm was evaluated to be unsuitable for an AV fistula and a dialysis access was created with a synthetic graft in the left femoral region.

The patient was multimorbid with hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and peripheral arterial disease. She had a history of an abdominal surgery with a resulting colostomy, a low left ventricular ejection fraction, and an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator.

A Doppler ultrasound of the fistula measured a flow of 2100 ml/min. A decision to close the fistula was made and an endovascular approach was decided considering the patient’s high surgical risk.
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Through a sheath in the right common femoral artery the left femoral artery was reached. Angiography showed a patent graft between the left common femoral artery and common femoral vein. The superficial femoral artery was totally occluded distally with the popliteal artery receiving flow from collateral vessels. The deep femoral artery was patent with low flow due to the created AV fistula. Revascularization of the superficial femoral artery was attempted unsuccessfully. The procedure was continued to closure of the AVF. The Amplatzer II Vascular plug was placed just distal to the arterial anastomosis to the proximal part of the graft (Fig. 1A). Following closure of the AVF, flow was improved in the deep femoral artery and restored to the popliteal and distal arteries (Fig. 1B, C). Pain and ischemic symptoms resolved after the procedure and the patient was discharged with a tunneled catheter in the left femoral vein. Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for the publication of the case report and the accompanying images.

DISCUSSION

DASS is a serious complication of AVFs that can cause pain, loss of motor function, or even the loss of the extremity. DASS occurs in 1–2% of distal fistulas and 5–10% of proximal fistulas of the upper extremity [4, 5]. Studies on lower extremity AVF with synthetic grafts report ischemic complications in 1–7% of patients [6, 7]. When untreated, DASS can result in the pain, paresthesia, and ulcerations of the limb. Once the diagnosis is made, treatment should follow in a timely fashion.

Several workarounds are practiced to preserve a functioning dialysis access while correcting ischemia of the extremity, such as the distal revascularization with interval ligation, revision using distal inflow, and others. These options may be inconclusive or infeasible due to patient comorbidities, complex vascular anatomy of the extremity with the AVF, or edema and wounds in the extremity which hinder the healing process. Choices for vascular access may be limited in patients with exhausted upper extremity routes and the lower extremity vessels may be considered in this difficult group of end-stage renal disease patients. It should be noted that lower extremity arterial disease is more prevalent in patients with chronic renal failure [8] and must be evaluated before the decision to create an AVF in the lower extremity to avoid difficult to manage complications.

If closure of the fistula becomes necessary, surgical ligation of arteriovenous fistula is the conventional approach; however, recent progress with endovascular experience has made closure with the Amplatzer Vascular Plug another alternative. The Amplatzer Vascular Plug has been used in the upper extremity for cases that required AVF closure due to DASS, heart failure, and central venous occlusion [2, 3, 9]. The same device can be used to treat DASS in the lower extremity as presented in our case.

Surgery is the first choice to be considered when an AVF requires closure. Endovascular methods can be safely considered in patients who require AVF closure and are not good surgical candidates.
Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for the publication of the case report and the accompanying images.

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