Mesenteric cystic lymphangioma with myxoid degeneration: unusual CT and MR manifestations

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Abstract. We report an unusual case of mesenteric cystic lymphangioma presenting as a large multilocular mass with a well-enhanced solid component and a central cleft, which were correlated to the prominent stromal myxoid degeneration interspersed with abundant capillaries and the central fibrosis, respectively. The findings of computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging are illustrated. Recognition of the multilocular configuration of the enhanced stroma may help to make the correct preoperative diagnosis.

Abdominal cystic lymphangiomas (ACL) are uncommon benign tumors with an incidence of 1 in 20,000 pediatric admissions [1]. ACL most commonly involve the mesentery, but also occur in the omentum and retroperitoneum. These lesions usually appear as well-defined unilocular or multilocular thin wall cysts without or with septations [2-5]. We describe the unusual computed tomographic (CT) and magnetic resonance (MR) findings of a case of mesenteric cystic lymphangioma with pathologic correlation.

Case report

A 7-year-old boy received right inguinal herniorrhaphy at another hospital 10 days before being referred to our hospital owing to abdominal distension and intermittent abdominal pain. On physical examination, distended abdomen with diffuse tenderness and muscle spasm was found. The laboratory findings were unremarkable except for mild eosinophilia. Plain film of the abdomen revealed a large mass displacing the bowel gas to the right lower quadrant and pelvis. Abdominal ultrasound (US) performed by the pediatrician revealed a huge solid tumor with heteroechogenicity occupying nearly the whole abdomen as found. Total excision of the tumor along with 60 cm of jejunal loops was done. On sectioning, the tumor was multiloculated with a central scar, but a large portion of the mass was filled up by a reddish solid substance. Microscopically, endothelium-lined cystic lymphatic spaces, prominent stromal myxoid degeneration with abundant capillaries, and central fibrosis were shown (Fig. 3). The final diagnosis was mesenteric cystic lymphangioma with prominent myxoid degeneration. The patient recovered uneventfully and there was no evidence of recurrence 3 months after surgery.

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Fig. 1. Axial enhanced CT shows faint inhomogeneous enhancement of the abdominal tumor peripheral to the hypodense central cleft (arrowheads)
Fig. 2a Coronal T1-weighted image [spin-echo (SE) TR 500/TE 10] shows a huge abdominal tumor with homogeneous low signal intensity (arrows). b Gd-DTPA enhanced coronal T1-weighted image (SE 466/11) reveals predominate well-enhanced soft tissue arranged in a multilocular pattern and the hypointense central cleft (arrowheads). c T2-weighted image (SE 2500/90) shows the hypointense central cleft while the rest of the tumor has become hyperintense.

Discussion

Lymphangiomas are believed to be developmental anomalies with failure of developing lymphatic tissues to establish normal communication with regional lymphatic drainage, resulting in dilatation of the abnormal channels. Histologically, lymphangiomas are classified as simple, cavernous and cystic types, depending on the size of the lymphatic spaces [2]. About 95% of lymphangiomas occur in neck and axillary regions. The remaining 5% may occur throughout the body, mostly in the abdominal mesentery [2-5].

About 25% of ACL are identified in the first decade of life [2-4]. Abdominal pain and distension are the most common presentations. The abdominal pain may be due to bleeding, infection, torsion or compression [1]. Palpation of ACL may be difficult as it is soft and may even mimic ascites [5]. Furthermore, as in our case, abdominal pain and muscle spasm hampered detailed physical examination. US and CT facilitate early diagnosis of the ACL and early treatment is advocated to avoid severe complications [1].

The imaging features of ACL have been well described. On US, ACL are typically single or multiple anechoic cysts without or with septations [3]. On CT, they usually present as well-defined homogeneous unilocular or multilocular low density lesions without or with slight wall enhancement. The attenuation value of the cysts is usually consistent with fluid density [2, 4]. Occasionally, a low CT attenuation value (~15 HU) due to the chylous content may be identified [4, 6]. On MR imaging, the lymphangiomas are usually hypointense on T1WI and hyperintense on T2WI, with focal linear inhomogeneities corresponding to the fibrous septa [7, 8].

In our case, a solid abdominal tumor was initially diagnosed by US. While ACL with hemorrhage or infection may mimic solid tumors or necrotic metastasis sonographically [2-4, 8], CT can reveal the cystic nature of

Fig. 3. Histologic section shows a cystic lymphangioma with dilated lymphatic space (L) surrounded by fibrous fatty septa (S) and marked stromal myxoid degeneration with abundant capillaries (M) (hematoxylin and eosin; original magnification x 21)