Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Rectum: Report of a Case Complicating Chronic Ulcerative Colitis

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Squamous cell carcinoma of the rectum is an unusual condition. Its rarity is illustrated by the fact that all of the 1,000 cases of rectal cancer reviewed by Dukes were adenocarcinoma, with the exception of a few of the mucoid variety.

The purpose of this communication is to report a case of an early invasive squamous cell carcinoma of the rectum, associated with extensive squamous metaplasia, in a patient with a ten-year history of ulcerative colitis.

Case Report

A 34-year-old Caucasian woman was admitted to the United States Naval Hospital on December 3, 1961, for investigation and treatment of ulcerative colitis which was known to have been present for approximately 10 years. Symptoms included frequent loose stools and intermittent small amounts of bleeding. The patient was told she had ulcerative colitis in January 1952, following an operation for a fistula-in-ano. One fistula was incised and another, which was said to be deep to the sphincter muscle, was not incised. The patient had been treated with various types of medication, including sulfa, and was given cortisone in 1954. She had taken steroid agents, in low dosage, continuously since that time. Approximately two weeks prior to admission, she noted backache and increased mucus in the stools. She was seen at another hospital where a biopsy of the rectal mucosa at a 5-cm. level was performed. The pathologist's report indicated that the tissue was probably malignant. Physical examination on admission was within normal limits except for striae on breasts and abdomen, without gross evidence of Cushing's syndrome, a palpable but nontender sigmoid flexure, and minimal varicose veins of the legs.

Received for publication April 30, 1963.

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Navy Department or the Naval Service as a whole.

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the epithelium appeared markedly atypical, showing increased cellularity, pleomorphism, hyperchromasia and frequent areas of mitotic activity (Figs. 4, 5 and 6). Changes were similar to those noted in carcinoma in situ. In addition, there was thickening of the epithelial layer and minimal keratinization. Additional sections, taken from the areas of most marked change, showed an even greater degree of nuclear pleomorphism with small isolated nests of cells breaking away from the main epithelial mass. These penetrated through the muscularis mucosae and invaded submucosal lymphatics (Fig. 7). There was no invasion of the muscularis mucosae or serosa, and sections of the mesenteric lymph nodes were free of tumor.

Discussion

Relatively few reports of squamous cell or epidermoid carcinoma of either the colon or rectum have appeared in medical literature. Hicks and Cowling6 cited a case of squamous carcinoma of the ascending colon, diagnosed at autopsy, in a 90-year-old woman. These authors considered several hypotheses concerning the mode of origin of this type of lesion, and concluded that inherent potentialities

Fig. 1. Abnormal mucosal pattern and pseudopolyp formation in descending portion of the colon.

Fig. 2. Smooth mucosal surface of the rectum with several coarse, confluent, pale gray plaques, but no discrete tumor.

Fig. 3. Rectal epithelium with squamous metaplasia at right (H & E, 108).