

Metastatic signet-ring cell carcinoma of the testis: an unusual presentation A case report in Syria

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August 22, 2023

Introduction

Metastasis in the testes is a relatively rare occurrence, accounting for only 0.02% to 2.5% of all testicular tumors and is more common in older individuals. Identifying the primary site of tumors that resemble those found in both the gastrointestinal tract (GIT) and testis can be challenging. This is where immunohistochemistry plays a crucial role in making an accurate diagnosis, leading to proper treatment.[1]

While primary malignancies in the small intestine are uncommon, accounting for only about 2.3% of all malignancies in the digestive system and 0.42% of all malignancies, it is essential to recognize the rare subtypes, such as signet-ring cell carcinoma (SRCC). SRCC is typically found in the stomach, but it can also occur in other organs such as the pancreas, breasts, bladder, ovaries, esophagus, lungs, and large intestine.[2]

This report highlights an unusual case of a 44-year-old male patient with signet-ring cell mucinous adenocarcinoma metastasis of unknown source in the right testis, possibly originating from the small intestine.

case presentation :

A 44-year-old male presented with right testicular swelling, heaviness, and weight loss for the past 3 months. He is a heavy smoker and non-alcoholic with no past medical, surgical, or family history. The physical examination was normal except for the painful testicular mass. Echography of the testis showed a solid mass measuring 10.5x8x6 cm in the right testicle with irregular borders and increased vascularity. A Computerized Tomography (CT) scan with contrast showed multiple metastases within the chest lymph nodes, ribs, liver, pancreas, adrenal glands, periaortic lymph nodes, axillary lymph nodes, and groin lymph nodes. Bone scintigraphy demonstrated abnormal accumulation of the radiotracer in the 2nd and 7th ribs, the head of the left humerus, and throughout the right femur. The previous tests assumed a primary testicular cancer with metastasis, although alpha-fetoprotein (AFP), lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), and human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) were normal. The team excised the right painful testicle and sent it for pathological studies.

Surprisingly, the pathology report of the right testicle came with a final diagnosis of testicular signet-ring cell carcinoma metastasis (Figure 1) with positive CK7, CK20, and CDX2 immunostains (Figure 2), which suggests a primary origin from either the stomach or small intestine. The upper and lower endoscopies with biopsies from the stomach and colons were normal. In line with the pathology report, the team suspected that the tumor was most likely from the small intestine. However, we could not confirm our suspicion due to the lack of equipment that can visualize the small intestine. Therefore, the primary origin of the tumor remains unknown.

SRCC is a rare and aggressive type of cancer that can explain the presence of multiple metastatic lesions in this patient. So, no further evaluation was performed to look for other metastatic sites due to the critical

condition of the patient at the time of presentation. And the team suggested FOLFOX chemotherapy treatment protocol, after ruling out the gastric origin and suspecting intestinal origin. Follow up is not yet reported.

Figure 1: Proliferation of signet ring cells with the displacement of the nucleus to the side by intracellular mucin. With accumulation of extracellular mucin.

Figure 2 A, B: CK20 Positive immunostain. C, D: CK7 Positive immunostain. E, F: CDX2 Positive Immunostain

Discussion

Metastasis of gastrointestinal tumors to the testes is a rare occurrence, and the identification of the primary site can pose a significant challenge in diagnosis and treatment planning [3]. This is a rare case of a 44-year-old male with signet-ring cell mucinous adenocarcinoma metastasis in the right testis, possibly originating from the small intestine. Notably, the metastasis in the testis was the only clinical manifestation observed, making this presentation uncommon.

Tumors can spread to the testis through various pathways, including hematogenous dissemination, retrograde migration through the lymphatic system, retrograde extension along the spermatic cord, and seeding of peritoneal surfaces, including the tunica vaginalis. [1] Subsequently, Tumor cells may migrate through the abdominal ring and over the open Haller's habenula to reach the testis, mimicking the pattern of migration seen in Krukenberg tumor in women. [1]

Nonetheless, the incidence of secondary metastasis to the testis is relatively low, which may be attributed to its unique anatomical features. The testes are situated in the scrotum, supported by scrotal tissue and spermatic cords. The serosal tunica vaginalis invaginates the testes, becoming separated from the processus vaginalis and peritoneal cavity just before birth. [1] Additionally, the relatively low temperature of the scrotum creates an unfavorable environment for metastatic tumor cells to survive, which explains the rarity of testicular metastases. [1]

Signet-ring cell carcinoma (SRCC) is a rare subtype of adenocarcinoma characterized by the presence of cells with abundant intracytoplasmic mucin, displacing the nuclei to the periphery. Although SRCC is more commonly associated with gastric cancer, it has been reported in other organs, including the small intestine. The prognosis for patients with SRCC in the small intestines is generally poor, with a five-year survival rate of 16.1%. [4] Early detection and appropriate treatment are essential in improving patient outcomes.

The patient's history of heavy smoking may have contributed to the development of the metastasis. The lack of significant past medical, surgical, or family history suggests that the patient was not at high risk for testicular cancer or metastatic disease. However, the patient's smoking history may have increased the risk of developing cancer and contributed to the development of this metastatic disease.[5]

Based on the physical findings of a painless, firm, and irregular mass arising from the testicle, a testicular tumor was suspected, and a radical orchiectomy of the right testes was deemed necessary for effective management of the patient's condition. [6] Despite the normal levels of AFP, LDH, and HCG, the possibility of a stromal tumor could not be ruled out. The procedure made the pathological diagnosis and staging possible, thereby aiding in the determination of the appropriate course of action.

While the imaging findings initially provided evidence of a primary testicular cancer with metastasis. The ultimate identification of the primary site of origin was achieved through the use of immunohistochemical markers. Specifically, positive staining for CK7, CK20, and CDX2 strongly suggested a gastrointestinal origin, with the stomach or small intestine being the most likely source. [7] This highlights the critical role that immunohistochemistry plays in determining the primary site of origin in metastatic tumors, especially in cases where imaging studies are inconclusive. Furthermore, upper and lower endoscopies with biopsies from the stomach and colon were performed to identify the primary site, but no abnormalities were detected.

The lack of equipment to visualize the small intestine limited the ability to confirm the suspicion of the small intestine as the primary site.

Once gastric SRCC was ruled out and an intestinal primary carcinoma is suspected, FOLFOX might be a proper treatment option. As it is used for surgically unresectable metastatic colorectal cancers and has shown activity in small intestinal adenocarcinomas. [8]

Unfortunately, the rarity of SRCC of the small intestine, and the lack of clinical trials made it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen therapy, further emphasizing the uncertainty surrounding the optimal treatment for this type of cancer.

Conclusion

This case report highlights the importance of immunohistochemistry in identifying the primary site of origin in metastatic tumors, particularly in rare presentations such as signet-ring cell carcinoma metastasis to the testis. Further research and clinical trials are needed to establish the optimal treatment strategies for SRCC of the small intestine and to improve the prognosis for patients with this rare malignancy. Finally, lifestyle modifications should be considered to reduce the risk of developing cancer and other diseases.

Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank Wafik Mayo, for providing valuable mentoring assistance during the preparation of this case report and would like to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT, for its assistance in enhancing the language.

Conflict of interest:

The authors want to declare that none of them is or was employed by any government agency that has any function other than research and education, and none of them is submitting this manuscript as an official representative or on behalf of the government.

Ethical approval:

Not applicable

CONSENT

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient 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.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The authors declare no source of funding for this manuscript from any organization or any institution.

Author contributions:

-Anwar chamout supervised and helped in writing the manuscript.

Zein A Alsayed Ahmad, Mohammed Mayo, Hassan Alshaker and Leen Jarjanazi wrote the manuscript. Zein A Alsayed Ahmad critically revised the manuscript.

Anwar Chammout, Zeina Zakkour and Rima Sanaa diagnosed and treated the case.

Yara Bilal performed histopathology tests for the case.

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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