Malignant Phyllodes Tumour in a 42 Year Old Mother

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Abstract

One among every nine women is diagnosed with breast cancer and it is the second main cause of death by cancer in women. Ductal carcinoma is the most common histopathological type of breast cancer. Phyllodes tumours are rare fibro epithelial lesions and constitute to about 0.3–0.9% among female breast tumours and occur in the 4th decade of life. Here we present a 42 year old mother who came to our ER with complaints of right sided breast lump and mastalgia for 6 months. She was diagnosed to have angiosarcoma through FNAC. She was admitted in our hospital for further evaluation and management. The tumour was staged as T3 N1 M0. The patient was taken up for modified radical mastectomy of the right breast with latissimusdorsi flap reconstruction. Histopathology reports suggested poorly differentiated sarcoma in a background of malignant phyllodes tumour. 3 out of 13 nodes were positive for nodal involvement.

Keywords: Phyllodes tumour

Background

One among every nine women is diagnosed with breast cancer. It has the second highest mortality rates. Ductal carcinoma is the most common histopathological type of breast cancer. Phyllodes tumours are rare fibro epithelial lesions and constitute to about 0.3–0.9% among female breast tumours. They mostly occur in the 4th decade of life [1]. In 1774, Phyllodes tumour was described as a type of fibro adenoma, followed by chelius in 1827. Johannes Muller [1838] coined the term cystosarcomaphyllodes because of the tumours macroscopic appearance, leaf like pattern [2]. Later in 1931, the first case of malignant phyllodes tumour was reported by Lee B, et al. [3]. Malignant potential of the tumour was reported by Cooper, et al. in 1943 [4]. In 1981 the World Health Organization [5] adopted the term phyllodestumour and was sub classified based on various histological features. The classification was benign, borderline, or malignant and the histological features were tumour margins, stromal over growth, tumour necrosis, cellular atypia, and number of mitosis per high power field. The majority of phyllodestumours are benign [35% to 64%]. This tumour has an unpredictable course that is not all of malignant forms are metastasizing and some of the benign ones can also metastasize [1].

Case Presentation

A 42 year old mother presented to our emergency department with complaints of right sided breast lump associated with mastalgia for the past 6 months. She was evaluated in a different hospital and was diagnosed to have angiosarcoma through FNAC. She was admitted in our hospital for further evaluation and management. The patient’s detailed history was impeccable except for having undergone fertility treatment for 5 years following which a girl baby was born of caesarean section [5 years
and was breast fed for 1 year. On examination (Figure 1) the patient had a 15x11x11 cm mass in the right breast with one palpable ipsilateral lymph lode. There was a scar in the lower outer quadrant which was in favour of FNAC site scar. The tumour was not fixed to the chest wall and there was no skin ulceration or other skin changes.

![Figure 1: Image showing right breast with tumour in the outer lower quadrant.](image1)

**Investigations**

A USG mammogram, CT thorax (Figure 2) and USG abdomen with pelvis were done to stage the tumour. Subsequently the tumour was staged as T3 N1 M0.

![Figure 2: CT thorax of the patient showing the tumour and the opposite side for comparison.](image2)

Routine blood investigations revealed elevated platelets and a low haemoglobin, which was corrected with blood transfusion.
Treatment

The patient was later taken up for modified radical mastectomy of the right breast with latissimus dorsi flap reconstruction (Figure 3). Intra operative and post-operative periods were uneventful. Drains were removed on POD 5 and sutures were removed on POD 11 and 12.

Figure 3: Immediate post-operative period, showing the latissimus dorsi flap reconstruction.

Outcome and Follow-Up

Histopathology reports suggested poorly differentiated sarcoma in a background of malignant phyllodes tumour – high grade. 3 out of 13 nodes were positive for nodal involvement. Tumour was seen to invade the dermis of the skin and there was no evidence of lymph vascular invasion (Figure 4 & 5).

Figure 4: Gross image of the excised specimen.

Discussion

Cystosarcoma phyllodes are rare fibro epithelial lesion. They are often confused with sarcomas [6]. The incidence of these tumours is about 2.1 per million and constitutes for about 0.3 to 0.5 % of all female breast tumours. The peak age in women is between 45 and 49 years [1]. Malignant phyllodes is observed in <1% amongst breast cancer [7]. These tumours are more common among Latin American white and Asian populations [8]. So far 10 cases have been reported on a rare combination of phyllodes tumour coexisting with breast carcinoma [9]. Primary breast sarcomas arise from mesenchymal tissue of the mammary gland and the incidence is calculated to be 45 per 10 million women. These tumours generally have high recurrence rates and poor prognosis. Phyllodes tumours are composed of connective tissue stroma and epithelial elements. Pathological presentation ranges from grade I to malignant phyllodes tumours [grade III] where the stromal component clearly exhibits a sarcoma pattern.

The exact etiology of phyllodes tumour is still unclear. However, some studies have suggested that, in fibro adenomas, there is a monoclonal proliferation due to a somatic mutation. This clonal analysis is well supported with the tumours natural propensity to local recurrence [10]. There’s yet another theory that says growth factor produced by the breast epithelium may cause stromal induction leading to phyllodes tumours. [7] Apart from these, tumour growth can be stimulated by Trauma, lactation, pregnancy and increased oestrogen activity. Some studies have also stated that endothelin-1, a stimulator of breast fibroblast growth, may be involved [8]. Some studies have also shown that an upregulation of
Phyllodes tumours are often indistinguishable from fibroadenomas and can be cured by local surgery. With the adoption, the importance of phyllodes tumours today lies in the need to differentiate them from other benign breast diseases. Treatment can be either wide local excision or mastectomy provided negative margins are ensured [8].

Stromal overgrowth, surgical margin status, tumour necrosis, and histologic subtype are reported to be the predictors for local or distant recurrence after primary surgery [14].

**Learning Points/Take Home Messages**

- Diseases can present in a wide range of signs and symptoms.
- Malignant transformation of phyllodes is possible and it has to be a part of the differential diagnosis.
- Surgery is the mainstay of management in such cases.

**References**

International Journal of Surgery & Surgical Techniques


