Primary appendiceal adenocarcinoma presenting as advanced ovarian cancer: a case report

Kung-Chuan Cheng

Chang Gung Memorial Hospital Kaohsiung Branch

Ko-Chao Lee

Chang Gung Memorial Hospital Kaohsiung Branch

Hong-Hwa Chen

Chang Gung Memorial Hospital Kaohsiung Branch

YC Ou (✉ tedycou@gmail.com)

Chang Gung Memorial Hospital Kaohsiung Branch

Case report

Keywords: Krukenberg's tumor, ovarian metastasis, primary appendiceal cancer

Posted Date: July 23rd, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-42721/v1>

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Abstract

Background Account for less than 1% of all gastrointestinal tumors, primary appendiceal malignancies are rare and their diagnoses are usually made after exploratory laparotomy. Most of them present with nonspecific symptoms, such as abdominal pain, abdominal fullness and huge pelvic mass, mimicking advanced stage ovarian cancer.

Case Presentation We described two menopausal women who were referred to our institution under the impression of advanced stage of primary ovarian cancer. However, both patients were eventually found to have primary appendiceal adenocarcinoma with ovarian metastasis at laparotomy. Initial symptoms, intraoperative finding, pathology finding, and postoperative clinical courses were recorded.

Conclusions Comparing with primary ovarian tumor, ovarian metastasis is relatively rare. The clinical picture can be misleading and the differential diagnoses of primary appendiceal cancer should be considered when preoperative workup is planned.

Introduction

The ovarian metastatic tumor, also known as Krukenberg tumor (KT), is a rare variety of metastatic cancer which accounts for less than 2% of all ovarian tumor¹, and although primary adenocarcinoma of the appendix only accounts for approximately 1% of all neoplasms of gastrointestinal origin, the incidence of ovarian metastasis in appendiceal adenocarcinoma is encountered in 16.7 to 37% of cases^{2, 3}.

Usually, these tumors are diagnosed postoperatively because of unspecific presentation or detection as an incidental finding during exploration for other surgical pathology. Even though abdominal ultrasound and computed tomography might be used, it is difficult to differentiate KT from other abdominal malignancies, including ovarian carcinoma. Here two patients with KT from an occult primary appendiceal adenocarcinoma are described that could only be identified at exploratory laparotomy. Clinical and pathological features of appendiceal tumors with ovarian metastasis are reviewed as well.

Case Presentation

Case 1

A 56-year-old female patient (gravida 7, para 4, abortion 3) presented with abdominal fullness. A pelvic ultrasound showed a complex mass of 18 × 20 cm on left side of the uterus with no free fluid in the abdominal cavity. The results of preoperative examinations, including chest X-ray, colonoscopy, and gastroscopy were all within normal range as were her hematology profile, serum chemistries, urinalysis and CA-125 values. However, her serum carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA) level was 17.1 ng/mL. Abdominal computed tomography (CT) scan showed a 21.4 × 14.4 cm heterogeneous mass in the right lower abdomen and pelvis with a small amount of ascites in the pelvis. Ovarian cancer was then

suspected (Fig. 1). At explorative laparotomy, a right ovarian tumor measuring 21 × 15 cm and a left ovarian tumor measuring 3 × 2 cm were found. Further exploration of the abdomen revealed a mucinous content tumor of about 2 × 2 cm in the tip of the appendix with mild lumen narrowing. Appendectomy was performed for frozen section pathology, and the result was adenocarcinoma of the appendix; therefore, bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, infracolic omentectomy and radical right hemicolectomy with ileotransversestomy and lymph node dissection were performed. The definitive pathological findings were as follows: left ovarian tumor was solid 18.5 × 15.5 × 14.0 cm and right ovarian tumor was 5.8 × 3.3 × 3.2 cm in size, histologically composed of multiple cystic tumors lined by neoplastic mucin-producing columnar epithelial cells bearing low-grade nuclei. The appendix was 8 cm with a diameter of 1.5 cm. The tumor had grown through the submucosa and muscular layers (Fig. 2). Immunohistochemical (IHC) staining with cytokeratin (CK) 7 and CK20 were performed for both the appendiceal and ovarian specimens, and both series were positive for CK20 and negative for CK7. The results were consistent with an adenocarcinoma of the appendix. Postoperatively, the patient received chemotherapy with oxaliplatin 85 mg/m² as a 2-hour infusion on day 1, leucovorin 400 mg/m² as a 2-hour infusion on day 1, followed by a loading dose of fluorouracil (5-FU, 400 mg/m²) IV bolus on day 1, then 5-FU (2,400 mg/m²) administered via ambulatory pump for a period of 46 hours every 2 weeks. The treatment course was 6 months. The CEA levels were then followed up and CT scan showed no evidence of recurrence 14 months after the surgery.

Case 2

A 54-year-old female (gravida 6, para 4, abortion 2) complained of epigastric fullness for one month at gynecological check-up. A pelvic ultrasound indicated complex masses of 15 × 15 cm bilaterally to the uterus and profuse ascites in the abdominal cavity. Barium enema was normal. The serum CA-125 level had increased to 94 U/mL and CEA level had increased to 17.6 ng/mL. Her hematology profile, serum chemistries, urinalysis and chest X-ray were normal. At explorative laparotomy, bilateral ovarian masses and multiple metastases to the omentum, subdiaphragm and subhepatic areas were found, and further exploration of the abdomen revealed a ruptured appendix with tumor seeding. Debulking surgery with total abdominal hysterectomy, bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, appendectomy, left hemicolectomy with anastomosis, supracolic omentectomy, and pelvic lymphadenectomy were therefore performed. The definitive pathological findings were as follows: both ovaries were solid tumors measuring 3.5 × 2.0 × 1.2 cm and 4.0 × 2.5 × 1.4 cm in size encased with mucinous materials. The histological tests revealed a composition of profuse mucinous pools with clusters of neoplastic mucinous epithelial cells bearing low-grade nuclei. The appendix was enlarged with cystic swelling measuring 3.8 cm with a diameter of 1.7 cm and the external surface was coated with mucinous substance. The tumor had grown through the submucosa, muscular and serosa layers. IHC staining with CK7 and CK20 were performed for the appendiceal and ovarian specimens, and both series were positive for CK20 (Figs. 3 and 4) and negative for CK7. The results were consistent with an adenocarcinoma of the appendix. Postoperatively, the patient received chemotherapy with oxaliplatin 85 mg/m² as a 2-hour infusion on day 1, leucovorin 400 mg/m² as a 2-hour infusion on day 1, followed by a loading dose of 5-FU (400 mg/m²) IV bolus on

day 1, then 5-FU (2,400 mg/m²) administered via ambulatory pump for a period of 46 hours every 2 weeks. The treatment course was 6 months. She developed a recurrent abdominal carcinomatosis causing intestinal obstruction 16 months after laparotomy.

Discussion And Conclusions

Primary appendiceal cancer with ovarian metastasis often presents with vague and nonspecific abdominal symptoms, and usually mimic advanced-stage ovarian primary malignancy. Because of the rarity of this disease and limited information provided by preoperative imaging, it is difficult to confirm the diagnosis before the operation; therefore the case is often mistaken as primary gynecological tumors rather than primary ovarian cancer rather than KT⁴.

Reported factors that account for misdiagnosis include lack of history of gastrointestinal symptoms, abdominal distention, elevated serum tumor marker such as CA 125 levels, and outside pathology reports in support of ovarian primary⁵. Oncological surgeons should keep in mind that primary appendiceal cancer is a possible origin source when the diagnosis of ovarian tumor cancer is confirmed.

The results of permanent IHC staining for CK are different for primary appendiceal cancer and primary ovarian cancer. In primary adenocarcinomas of the large intestine and appendix, it is uniformly stained positively for CK 20 and presents typically in a diffuse pattern. Although CK20 is also positive for 75% of primary ovarian mucinous carcinomas, the staining is commonly patchy. In contrast, primary ovarian epithelial tumors of all cell types are stained for more than 96% of cases and the cytoplasm are typically strongly marked^{6,7}. However, permanent result of IHC staining is usually confirmed after surgery. If the diagnosis of primary appendiceal cancer can be established intraoperatively, it would not only lead to a correct diagnosis and optimal surgery but also avoid any subsequent operation; otherwise, occult appendiceal metastases might occur in patients with primary epithelial ovarian cancer (5–10% in early stage) and are diagnosed only after microscopic examination of the appendix^{8,9}. Appendectomy should be part of staging surgery in patients with presumed ovarian cancer. Especially in cases without definite primary lesion, routine appendectomy should be recommended, because the appendix might appear macroscopically normal.

Adnexal tumors are common among women of all ages and malignant ovarian tumors need to be recognized in order to expedite appropriate treatment. Survival from primary appendiceal cancer depends on extent of tumor, tumor location, and cell type. Because of the rarity of primary appendiceal cancer, issues regarding diagnosis, surgical management, and adjuvant chemotherapy are not well established, although aggressive resection and treatment should be offered to young patients with ovarian metastasis, as this generally confers a 5-year survival advantage of 20–30%⁸.

Managing a pelvic mass is one of the common problems for gynecologists; unfortunately, there is no reliable method to distinguish between benign and malignant ovarian tumors. Gynecologists as well as radiologists should consider carcinoma of the appendix in the differential diagnosis of pelvic mass. Both

our cases were presented with elevation of CEA levels preoperatively, but their studies of barium enema and colonoscopy were normal. This might be a clue for us to make the diagnosis of metastatic ovarian tumor from GI tract. Abnormal elevation of CEA level is less common in early stages of primary ovarian cancer. On the other hand, in patients with colorectal cancer, it is associated with all stages of the disease. Some reports suggest that ovarian metastasis from colorectal origin should be consider in any patient whose CA-125/CEA ration is less than 25¹⁰.

Recent studies reveal Human Epididymis Protein 4 (HE4) is superior to distinguish benign ovarian tumors from primary ovarian malignancies¹¹. Whether HE4 can be used to identify the primary ovarian cancer from metastatic tumors might need further evaluation. We suggest that the CEA and HE4 tests be offered to women patients with suspected ovarian tumors to assist in making preliminary diagnosis before surgery, especially those with primary sites that are difficult to determine.

Since primary appendiceal adenocarcinoma is rare, these cases remind gynecological surgeons to be familiar with primary appendiceal tumors and to inspect the appendix when the initial exploration surgery is to be performed. The clinical picture can be misleading and the differential diagnoses of primary appendiceal cancer should be considered when preoperative workup is planned.

List Of Abbreviations

KT: Krukenberg tumor

CT: Computed tomography

CEA: carcinoembryonic antigen

CK: cytokeratin

5-FU: fluorouracil

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Statement: The IRB reviewed and determined that it is expedited review according to Case research or cases treated or diagnosed by clinical routines.

Consent for publication

Consents have been obtained from the patients.

Availability of data and materials

The data describe during the current study are not publicly available due patient's privacy but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding

The authors received no specific funding for this work.

Authors' contributions

Ko-Chao Lee and Hong-Hwa Chen performed colectomy and postoperative adjuvant chemotherapy for patients and recorded their clinical courses. Kung-Chuan Cheng was a major contributor in writing the manuscript. Yu-Che Ou contributed to the conception of this issue and literature review.

Acknowledgements

Not applicable

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Figures

Figure 1

Contrast-enhanced computed tomography scan reveals a 21.4x14.4cm heterogeneous mass, which evidences a metastatic ovarian tumor.

Figure 2

A black arrowhead indicates a swollen appendix with mucinous content tumor of about 2 x 2 cm in the tip of appendix.

Figure 3

A red arrowhead shows CK20 in appendiceal primary adenocarcinoma (IHC stain).

Figure 4

A blue arrowhead shows CK20 in ovarian metastatic tumor (IHC stain).