LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Alveolar Echinococcosis Mimicking Liver Malignancy

Shahryar Hashemzadeh,1* Kamran Mamagani,1 Ashraf Fakhrjou2

1Department of General Surgery, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran
2Department of and Pathology, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

ABSTRACT


Key words: hepatic echinococcus, liver, malignancy

Human alveolar echinococcosis is a rare and potentially fatal infestation caused by echinococcus multilocularis, which usually involves the liver1. This disease is geographically widespread and is distributed from Canada and the United States through Europe and Eurasia to Japan2. Because of its invasive nature, alveolar echinococcosis may sometimes manifest as a tumoral lesion3 and mislead the clinician. There is little literature in English describing such a clinical scenario. Here, we report a patient with hepatic echinococcus multilocularis infestation mimicking a liver malignancy on imaging and surgical examinations. Considering the widespread nature of this infestation, we hope this report will aid clinicians abroad in dealing with liver disease.

A 55-year-old woman from the north west of Iran was admitted to the hospital with vague history of epigastric and right upper abdominal pain for one year. She noted anorexia, weight loss and flatulence but a rather normal bowel habit and no fever. Physical examination revealed an ill-appearing old woman who was not in acute distress. A firm and partially tender hepatomegaly with a rough hepatic mass extending to the epigastrium was found on palpation of the abdomen.

The initial laboratory results were remarkable only for mildly elevated alanine and aspartate aminotransferases. Abdominal ultrasonography showed a large, ill-defined liver mass with heterogeneous echogenicity and irregular border. A computerized topographic scan revealed an irregular, hypodense and heterogeneous mass occupying most of the left liver lobe. With the diagnosis of liver malignancy, the patient underwent a laparotomy to resect the hepatic mass with left lateral segmentectomy. Intraoperative findings were a large and adherent liver mass with some regions of white, band-like lesions (fibrosis). Pathological examination of the specimen demonstrated a hepatic alveolar echinococcosis.

Hepatic echinococcus multilocularis infestation must be included in the differential diagnosis of solid liver masses. Alveolar echinococcosis mimicking a liver malignancy in radiological and surgical examinations is seemingly rare, with very few reports in the English language literature. The incidence is about 2.5 and 7.2 cases per year in Austria and Switzerland, respectively3. Actually, the relative infrequency of this infestation compared to liver malignancy makes it a very improbable diagnosis on initial presentation of a malignant-looking liver mass. Hence, we emphasize that clinicians should consider alveolar echinococcosis as a possible etiology of malignant-appearing liver masses, particularly in areas where the infestation is endemic.

REFERENCES


* Address correspondence to Shahryar Hashemzadeh, MD, Department of General & Thoracic Surgery, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran; Tel: +984113347054-9; Fax: +984113341317; E-mail: shahriar_90@yahoo.com

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