Pulmonary resection for localized lesions of cryptococcosis (torulosis): a review of eight cases

F. S. Smith, P. Gibson, T. T. Nicholls, and J. A. Simpson

Thoracic Surgical Unit, Perth, West Australia

Cryptococcosis (torulosis) is most commonly due, in man, to infection by Cryptococcus neoformans. This saprophytic, budding, yeast-like, encapsulated micro-organism is widely distributed in soil throughout the world. The organism enters the body through the respiratory tract.

On the basis of postmortem studies, it has recently become apparent that the pathogenesis of primary cryptococcal infection in the lung may often be similar to that of primary tuberculosis (Salyer, Salyer, and Baker, 1974).

The combination of a subpleural nodule and related hilar node involvement may thus be referred to as a primary complex. Its outcome may be:

Benign and self-limited:

- With resolution of the primary complex.

Locally persistent:

- Should the pulmonary focus be contained locally, the parenchymal lesion in the lung will persist and may be recognized radiologically.

Locally progressive:

- Continued direct invasion by the organism leads to progressive encroachment on the surrounding lung substance or the adjacent pleural cavity.

 Widely disseminated:

- Bloodborne spread may involve distant sites, particularly the central nervous system.

The patient may be symptomless, and physical signs may be absent. Commonly, it is the incidental radiological demonstration of a non-specific peripheral pulmonary shadow which draws attention to the disease.

The condition is notoriously difficult to diagnose clinically—the only sure way being the demonstration of the causative organism in the pulmonary lesion. Its recovery from sputum examination is unlikely in the case of a circumscribed parenchymal lesion. It is not surprising that the diagnosis is often not made until after thoracotomy.

PATIENTS

Eight histologically confirmed cases of pulmonary cryptococcosis in patients who underwent resection were studied (Table). The clinical course and radiological progress of each patient were reviewed, and the present state of the patient was determined.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE REPORTS

CASE 2  A 23-year-old foreman was investigated in July 1964 (with negative results) on account of a discrete dense opacity in the right lower lobe, which had been found on mass miniature radiography (Fig. 1). A review of chest films, taken five years previously while the patient was in the Navy, revealed a soft opacity in the right lower lobe. The patient declined operation for five months while under observation until the mass had enlarged appreciably (Fig. 2). Right lower lobectomy revealed torulosis. The lesion was well encapsulated. The cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) was normal. No chemotherapy was given. The patient remains well nine years after operation. This pulmonary lesion had remained locally persistent and inactive for at least five years before it became locally progressive.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex/Age</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Sputum</th>
<th>Radiological Appearance</th>
<th>Bronchoscopy</th>
<th>CSF</th>
<th>Preop Diagnosis</th>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Histological Appearance</th>
<th>Antibiotics</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>M 42</td>
<td>Symptomless MMR finding</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Peripheral shadow RLL</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Not made</td>
<td>Segmental resection frozen section (FS) suggested carcinoma; right lower lobectomy completed</td>
<td>Right lower lobectomy</td>
<td>Encapsulation incomplete</td>
<td>Amphotericin B postop. for 4 weeks; interrupted by nephrotoxicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>M 23</td>
<td>Symptomless</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Peripheral shadow RLL enlarged over five months' observation</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Not made</td>
<td>Right lower lobectomy</td>
<td>Well encapsulated lesion</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Remains well after 11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>M 33</td>
<td>Symptomless MMR finding</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Peripheral shadow RUL</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Not done</td>
<td>Not made</td>
<td>Right upper lobectomy</td>
<td>Poor encapsulation; cryptococci in hilar lymph node Loose fibrous encapsulation</td>
<td>Amphotericin B postop. for 4 weeks; nephrotoxicity noted</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>F 58</td>
<td>Neck pain (unrelated)</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Peripheral round shadow</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>LP unsuccessful</td>
<td>Not made</td>
<td>Enucleation of lesion indistinguishable from hamartoma; FS revealed toruloma</td>
<td>Right upper lobectomy</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Remains well after 9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>M 27</td>
<td>Cough, fever, haemoptysis</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Peripheral shadow RUL with cavitation (Fig. 5)</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Made on sputum examination</td>
<td>Made on CSF examination</td>
<td>Well encapsulated lesion; central necrosis (Fig. 6)</td>
<td>Amphotericin B for one week limited by nephrotoxicity</td>
<td>Remains well after 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>M 37</td>
<td>Symptomless MMR finding</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Peripheral shadow</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Not done</td>
<td>Not made</td>
<td>Wedge resection; FS revealed toruloma; left upper lobectomy completed</td>
<td>Wedge resection</td>
<td>Encapsulated lesion</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>F 35</td>
<td>'Head cold' followed by signs of meningitis</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Infiltrate R. mid-zone contracting to peripheral round shadow</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Positive for cryptococci</td>
<td>Made on CSF examination</td>
<td>Made on needle aspiration of lesion R. lower lobe</td>
<td>Right lower lobectomy</td>
<td>Incomplete encapsulation</td>
<td>Amphotericin B one week only; 5-FC for 10 weeks pre-op., 2 weeks post-op.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>F 18</td>
<td>Symptomless</td>
<td>One colony of Aspergillus</td>
<td>Opacity R. mid-zone; nursing aide applicant-routine chest film</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Not done</td>
<td>Made on needle aspiration of lesion R. lower lobe</td>
<td>Right lower lobectomy</td>
<td>5-FC 2 weeks pre-op., 10 weeks post-op.</td>
<td>Remains well after 1 year</td>
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MMR = mass miniature radiograph.
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FIG. 1. Case 2. Toruloma right lower lobe.

FIG. 2. Case 2. Shows increase in size over five months.
CASE 7  An aboriginal woman of 35 years was treated with antibiotics for a 'head cold' in early July 1971. A week later she was flown to Perth with drowsiness, headache, and signs of meningitis. Rhonchi were heard over the right chest. A lumbar puncture showed yeast cells in the CSF. A chest film (Fig. 3) showed an infiltrate in the right lung. A course of amphotericin B was begun.

Raised intracranial pressure due to basal cisternal blockage was relieved by an Ommaya reservoir and frequent extraction of CSF. 5-Fluorocytosine (5-FC) was administered from 15 July 1971 in a dose of 200 mg/kg per day and this abolished the cryptococcal meningitis. By 23 July 1971 the lung infiltrate had cleared, except for a rounded opacity in the right midzone (Fig. 4) which then remained virtually unchanged over several weeks, despite continued administration of 5-FC.

On 18 October 1971 wedge resection of a toruloma, 1·5 cm in diameter in the right upper lobe, was carried out under intravenous 5-FC cover, which was continued orally for a further two weeks. The patient's recovery was uneventful and she remains well. She has had a further pregnancy without incident.

Comment  This patient presented with evidence of both pulmonary involvement and distant spread to the central nervous system. Once the meningitis had been controlled, the pulmonary focus was resected uneventfully.

DISCUSSION

Nearly 40 years ago, early surgical removal of a localized area of pulmonary torulosis was first considered (Taber, 1937).

By 1945, the first report of pulmonary resection for this condition had appeared (Dormer et al., 1945). Sporadic reports over the next 25 years (Froio and Bailey, 1949; Berk and Gerstle, 1952; Poppe, 1954; White and Arany, 1958; Perkins, 1969; Hatcher et al., 1971; Epstein, Cole, and Hunt, 1972) indicated the safety of resection.

Despite the differing operative procedures employed in this series, the results were uniformly satisfactory, with an absence of surgical complications. In no case did the condition disseminate as the result of operation.

Routine sputum examination revealed the organism in one patient only.

Standard bronchoscopy was unhelpful as a

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FIG. 5. Case 5. Unusual cavitated lesion in the right upper lobe.
It is apparent that excision of a circumscribed pulmonary lesion eliminates it as a focus for dissemination and is an almost complication-free operation. However, the mortality from established cryptococcal meningitis (once spread from the lungs has occurred) is considerable. Resection of the pulmonary lesion is therefore a reasonable diagnostic and therapeutic manoeuvre.

Our thanks are due to the physicians of the Royal Perth and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospitals for investigating and referring these patients.

REFERENCES


Requests for reprints to: F. S. Smith, FRCS, Thoracic Surgical Unit, Royal Perth Hospital, W. Australia.
Pulmonary resection for localized lesions of cryptococcosis (torulosis): a review of eight cases.
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Thorax 1976 31: 121-126
doi: 10.1136/thx.31.2.121

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