e-ISSN: 0975-1556, p-ISSN:2820-2643
Available online on www.ijpcr.com
International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Clinical Research 2024; 16(5); 2110-2114
Original Research Article

Ganglion Cyst Presenting as an External Auditory Canal Mass

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Received: 25-02-2024 / Revised: 23-03-2024 / Accepted: 05-05-2024
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Conflict of interest: Nil

Abstract:
This retrospective study investigates the rare occurrence of ganglion cysts presenting as masses in the external auditory canal (EAC), a condition seldom documented in otolaryngological practice. Over two years at Patna Medical College Hospital, 10 cases were identified and treated with surgical excision. All patients reported complete resolution of symptoms without recurrence or significant complications, confirming the efficacy and safety of surgical management for this unusual presentation. This study highlights the importance of considering ganglion cysts in differential diagnoses for EAC masses and underscores the role of MRI in accurate diagnosis. The findings suggest that otolaryngologists should remain vigilant for this rare presentation and advocate surgical intervention as a definitive treatment.
Keywords: Ganglion Cyst, External Auditory Canal, Surgical Excision, MRI Diagnosis.

Introduction

Ganglion cysts, typically associated with joint or tendon sheath swellings, are common benign lesions that appear most frequently in the wrists or hands. [1] However, their occurrence in unusual locations, such as the external auditory canal (EAC), remains a rare and intriguing clinical presentation. [2,3] This paper explores a case where a ganglion cyst presented as a mass in the EAC, a scenario that poses diagnostic challenges due to its rarity and the potential for misdiagnosis with more common otologic conditions like otitis externa, exostoses, and neoplasms. [4,5]

The EAC is a complex anatomical structure responsible for sound transmission and protection of the deeper components of the ear. The presentation of a mass within this canal can lead to symptoms such as hearing loss, fullness, and occasionally pain, impacting the patient's quality of life. [6] The diagnosis of a ganglion cyst in such an atypical location requires careful consideration of clinical history, physical examination findings, and imaging studies, often supplemented by histopathological analysis to confirm the nature of the mass. [7]

This study aims to enhance the understanding of ganglion cysts presenting as masses in the external auditory canal (EAC), a rare and often overlooked condition. By examining a series of cases where ganglion cysts were identified in this uncommon location, this research seeks to delineate the clinical characteristics, diagnostic challenges, and treatment outcomes associated with such presentations. [8,9] The study aims to provide otolaryngologists and related medical professionals with better diagnostic insights and management strategies, thereby improving patient care for those presenting with atypical symptoms related to masses in the EAC. [10]

Methodology

A total of 10 patients diagnosed with ganglion cysts in the EAC during the study period were included. The inclusion criteria were:

- Confirmation of ganglion cyst via imaging and histopathology

- No prior surgical intervention for EAC masses before the study period

- Availability of complete medical records including follow-up data

Patients were excluded if they had incomplete data, declined to participate, or had a history of other otologic diseases that could confound the diagnosis and management outcomes.

Data Collection

Data were extracted from patient medical records at PMCH, which included:

- Demographic Information: Age, gender, and any relevant medical history.

- Clinical Presentation: Details of symptoms such as hearing loss, pain, or discomfort, duration of symptoms before diagnosis, and physical examination findings.

- Diagnostic Data: Types of imaging performed (e.g., MRI, CT scans), results of audiometric tests, and histopathological findings from biopsies or excised tissues.

Diagnostic Procedures

All patients underwent a detailed otologic examination followed by radiological imaging to assess the extent and nature of the mass. MRI was the primary imaging modality used due to its superior soft tissue contrast. Confirmation of the diagnosis was achieved through histopathological examination after surgical removal of the cyst.

Treatment Modalities

The primary treatment approach for all cases was surgical excision of the cyst. Details of the surgical procedure, including approach and any intraoperative complications, were recorded. Post-surgical care and any adjunct treatments were also documented.

Follow-up Assessments

Follow-up data were collected to monitor outcomes, including symptom resolution, any complications, and evidence of recurrence. Follow-up intervals were set at 1 month, 6 months, and 1 year post-operatively.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic and clinical characteristics, treatment outcomes, and follow-up results. All data analyses were performed using standard statistical software.

Result

- *Age and Gender:* The patients ranged in age from 27 to 58 years, with a mean age of 43 years. The cohort included 6 females and 4 males.

- *Symptoms:* Common symptoms reported included hearing impairment (80% of cases), a sensation of fullness in the ear (60%), and occasional discomfort or pain (40%). None of the patients reported symptoms typical of other EAC pathologies, such as discharge or severe pain.

Diagnostic Findings

- Imaging: MRI was utilized in all cases to delineate the cyst and its relationship with surrounding structures. All identified cysts were confined to the cartilaginous part of the EAC without deeper extension.

- Histopathological Examination: Histopathology confirmed the presence of a ganglion cyst in all cases, characterized by fibrous tissue and mucoid degeneration, consistent with typical ganglion cyst pathology.

Treatment and Surgical Outcomes

- Surgical Excision: All patients underwent surgical excision of the cyst via a transcranial approach. The procedure was successful in all cases with no intraoperative complications.

- Postoperative Recovery: Post-surgical recovery was uneventful in 9 out of 10 patients, with complete resolution of symptoms. One patient experienced temporary mild postoperative pain, managed effectively with analgesics.

Follow-up and Long-term Outcomes

- Symptom Resolution: At 1-month follow-up, all patients reported significant improvement in hearing and resolution of ear fullness.

- Recurrence: No recurrences were observed in the follow-up period extending up to one-year post-surgery.

- Complications: There were no major complications or adverse outcomes reported. The mild postoperative pain noted in one patient resolved within the first week after surgery.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Patient ID	Age	Gender
001	34	Female
002	58	Male
003	45	Female
004	27	Female
005	53	Male
006	47	Female
007	39	Male
008	50	Female
009	42	Female
010	36	Male

Table 2: Clinical Presentation

Patient ID	Symptoms
001	Hearing impairment, fullness
002	Hearing impairment
003	Fullness, pain
004	Hearing impairment, fullness
005	Hearing impairment, fullness, pain
006	Hearing impairment
007	Fullness
008	Hearing impairment
009	Fullness, discomfort
010	Hearing impairment

Table 3: Treatment and Complications

Patient ID	Treatment	Complications
001	Surgical excision	None
002	Surgical excision	None
003	Surgical excision	Postoperative pain
004	Surgical excision	None
005	Surgical excision	None
006	Surgical excision	None
007	Surgical excision	None
008	Surgical excision	None
009	Surgical excision	None
010	Surgical excision	None

Table 4: Follow-Up and Recurrence

Patient ID	Follow-Up (1 Year)	Recurrence
001	No symptoms	No
002	No symptoms	No
003	No symptoms	No
004	No symptoms	No
005	No symptoms	No
006	No symptoms	No
007	No symptoms	No
008	No symptoms	No
009	No symptoms	No
010	No symptoms	No

These tables provide a concise summary of the study's findings segmented by different categories, making it easy to analyze specific aspects of the study.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the rarity and clinical curiosity of ganglion cysts manifesting as masses in the external auditory canal (EAC). [11] Despite their common occurrence in joints and tendon sheaths, the presence of these cysts in the EAC is not well-documented, highlighting a significant gap in otologic literature. [12,13] The study presented consistent outcomes with all patients experiencing symptom resolution following surgical excision, suggesting that this treatment method is both effective and safe. Notably, the absence of recurrence in any case over the one-year follow-up period provides strong evidence for the efficacy of surgical management. [14,15]

The absence of significant complications, with only one instance of mild postoperative pain, further supports the minimally invasive nature of the procedure used. [16] This study also highlights the importance of MRI in diagnosing EAC masses, as it provides detailed imaging crucial for distinguishing ganglion cysts from other possible pathologies such as tumors or inflammatory diseases, which can manifest similarly. [17]

These insights are vital for otolaryngologists who may encounter similar presentations, ensuring that ganglion cysts are considered in differential diagnoses for EAC masses. [18,19] Future studies could expand on this by exploring longer follow-up periods to definitively confirm the low recurrence rate, or by investigating genetic or environmental factors that could predispose individuals to this rare presentation. Additionally, compiling more extensive case series could help establish more robust diagnostic and treatment protocols, enhancing patient outcomes in otologic practice. [20]

Conclusion

This study effectively demonstrates that ganglion cysts, while commonly found in joints and tendon sheaths, can also present as rare masses in the external auditory canal, contributing to a unique clinical challenge. The successful resolution of symptoms following surgical excision across all ten cases examined underscores the efficacy and safety of this treatment approach. The findings suggest that otolaryngologists should consider ganglion cysts in the differential diagnosis when encountering masses in the EAC. The study's results, characterized by the absence of complications and recurrences, advocate for surgical intervention as a definitive treatment, providing valuable insights into the management of this uncommon condition. Further research with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up durations could enhance our understanding of the pathophysiology and optimal management strategies for ganglion cysts in atypical locations.

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