

A sudden pain in the neck: an atypical presentation of cystic lymphangioma

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DESCRIPTION

A 12-year-old girl presented with a 4 h history of pain and sudden onset neck swelling. There were preceding symptoms of a mild upper respiratory tract infection. On examination there was a fluctuant tender swelling extending into the anterior and posterior triangles (levels III, IV and V; figures 1). Skin erythema occurred 24 h following onset of swelling. Laboratory results reported a white cell count of 13.8 and C reactive protein of 15. During admission she spiked a temperature of 38.5°C. An ultrasound was performed followed by an MRI that reported a multiloculated cystic mass measuring 7.8×2.2×3.2 cm anterior to sternocleidomastoid and abutting the brachiocephalic vein and carotid artery (figures 2 and 3). There was also postcontrast enhancement of surrounding tissue. She received 24 h of intravenous antibiotics then was discharged on oral continuation. At 1-month follow-up the swelling had completely resolved. Should swelling

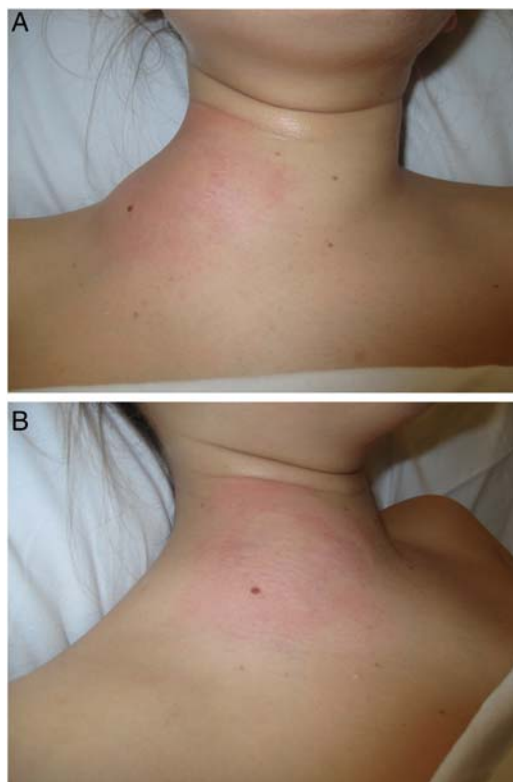


Figure 1 (A, B) Clinical photographs showing right anteroposterior triangle swelling.

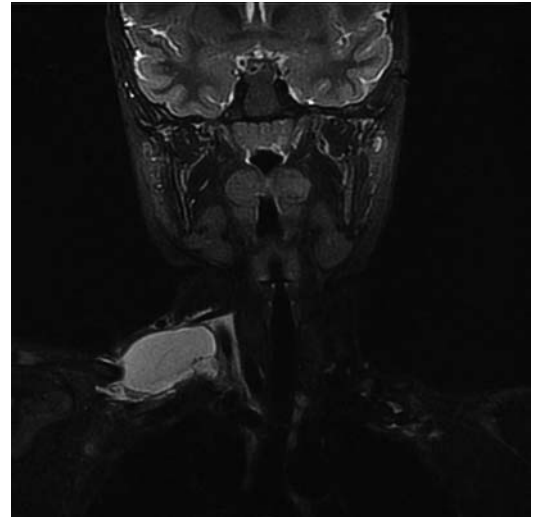


Figure 2 Coronal view of T2-weighted short- τ inversion recovery MRI with contrast showing a large hyperintense mass, right side of the neck.

of the lymphangioma recur surgical excision or use of a sclerosing agent would be considered.

A cystic lymphangioma is a congenital lymphatic malformation that typically presents as a non-tender, slowly expanding, fluctuant mass. Our case unusually describes pain as a presenting symptom likely due to infection and the rapid expansion of the cystic lymphangioma. These swellings are rare in adolescents or adults and are most commonly diagnosed at birth. By the age of 2 90% of cystic lymphangiomas will have become clinically evident.¹ Differential diagnoses includes branchial cleft cyst, lipoma, thyroid mass, lymphadenopathy, hamartoma, haemangioma and thyroglossal duct cyst.²

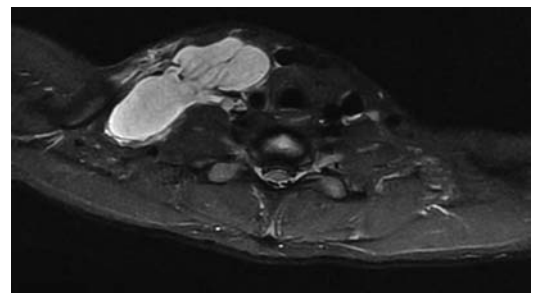


Figure 3 Axial view of T2-weighted short- τ inversion recovery MRI with contrast showing a large hyperintense mass, right side of the neck.



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Learning points

- ▶ Neck swelling due to cystic lymphangioma is rare after the age of 2.
- ▶ Typically they present as gradually expanding non-tender, fluctuant masses.
- ▶ They may atypically present with rapid onset of swelling and pain.

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