Get off my back! Inferior vena cava filter erosion into the lumbar spine

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DESCRIPTION
We present the case of an 84-year-old woman with a medical history of both provoked and unprovoked deep venous thromboembolisms and heterozygosity for Factor V Leiden, on chronic rivaroxaban 20 mg/day, who was seen at our institution with increasing left leg swelling and discomfort. On examination, she was breathing and resting comfortably. She had slight increased circumference of the left lower extremity in relation to the right lower extremity with tenderness to palpation. Positive Homan and Lisker’s sign were noted. Dorsalis pedis and posterior tibialis pulses were two out of four in both lower extremities. On questioning, she denied any recent long distance travel or trauma (to include surgery) and did not miss any doses of her rivaroxaban. She had no family history of bleeding diathesis or thrombotic events. Her surgical history was notable for the placement of an inferior vena cava filter (IVCF) in 2015 due to deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in the setting of a concurrent gastrointestinal bleed (which prohibited the use of therapeutic anticoagulation at that time). Vital signs were stable, and the patient did not look unwell. She had a normal haemoglobin, haematocrit, platelet count and coagulation laboratory panel. Deep venous ultrasound of the left lower extremity revealed evidence of DVT extending from the left common femoral vein to the left popliteal vein. Given the presumed failure of rivaroxaban, she was transitioned to a heparin drip on admission. Review of her medical chart (to include prior CT imaging from 2017 of the abdomen and pelvis) revealed the posterior limb of the IVCF traversing the caval wall and terminating and embedded in the L3 vertebral body (figure 1). Vascular surgery was consulted due to the concern for potential retroperitoneal bleed due to her concurrent heparin drip. Given the chronicity of the findings, and lack of symptoms otherwise, surgical intervention was not considered emergent and instead, repeat imaging was recommended. As can be seen in figure 2, repeat imaging showed no significant progression or worsening of the position of the IVCF. Given its unchanged appearance, and her current thrombotic episode, no surgical intervention was advised. The patient was ultimately discharged on dabigatran with close vascular surgery follow-up.

IVCFs are devices that capture propagating thrombi from the lower extremities to the pulmonary arteries. Placement is considered in a select group of patients with a contraindication to anticoagulation who are found to have venous thromboembolism at high risk for recurrence and/or propagation to pulmonary embolism. Such contraindications include active gastrointestinal bleed (as in our patient’s history), cerebral...
haemorrhage and haemorrhagic stroke among others. There are two major types: retrievable and permanent. Since their introduction in the late 1990’s, the placement of retrievable IVC filters has risen in part due to reportedly lower complication rates than permanent filters, which associated with an increased incidence of recurrent DVTs, filter migration, caval wall perforation, thrombosis, infection, pulmonary emboli and filter fracture. Despite limited evidence supporting their ability to truly prevent thromboembolic disease but contraindications to systemic anticoagulation, given the significant risk the device poses to the patient. Regardless of the type of filter placed, a clear plan prior to, or on placement, aimed towards eventual removal within 59 days of insertion, should be established assuming the contraindication for anticoagulation has resolved.

Learning points

- While controversial, inferior vena cava filter placement should only be considered in patients with a high risk of thromboembolic disease but contraindications to systemic anticoagulation.
- Regardless of the type of filter placed, a clear plan prior to, or on placement, aimed towards eventual removal within 59 days of insertion, should be established assuming the contraindication for anticoagulation has resolved.

REFERENCES


Contributors IM: substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting the article, revising it critically for important intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published. AF and MRP: substantial contributions to the acquisition of data, revising it critically for important intellectual content and final approval of the version to be published.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Disclaimer The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Army, Department of Defense or the US Government.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Obtained.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

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