Right atrial mass: a challenging diagnosis

James Steven Tomlinson,1 Maged El-Gaaly,1 Selina Khan,2 Mark Papouchado1

DESCRIPTION

An 85-year-old Caucasian man was found to have an incidental right atrial mass on transthoracic echocardiography (figure 1A), requested following an opportunistic finding of Wenckebach heart block.

He reported no previous significant medical history, was fit and well on presentation with full exercise tolerance. There were no risk factors for venous thromboembolism, and he had no significant family history of cardiac disease. Physical examination was unremarkable; cardiac auscultation revealed no murmurs; his chest was clear and there was no evidence of right-sided heart failure.

Echocardiography demonstrated a broad-based, mobile mass arising from the interatrial septum filling 68% of the right atrium. This measured 4.5×4 cm from the apical four chamber view with partial prolapse through the tricuspid valve, but without outflow obstruction or tricuspid stenosis. CT pulmonary angiography (CTPA) confirmed a right atrial mass adherent to the interatrial septum but without discernible contrast enhancement or evidence of a stalk. Positron emission tomographic-CT (PET/CT) showed low grades of 18F-flurodeoxyglucose (FDG) uptake in the mass only (figure 2).

Serial echocardiography over a period of 6 months showed no change in the size of the mass despite therapeutic anticoagulation with heparin (figure 1B). The patient remained asymptomatic but eventually opted for surgery.

The accurate diagnosis of a poorly defined right atrial mass is challenging and not always easily visualised on standard imaging. The most common pathology is that of thrombus due to its connection with the deep venous system, however atrial myxoma, metastatic and other rare tumours have also been reported.1

Trans thoracic echocardiography has traditionally been used as the primary diagnostic imaging technique for cardiac masses. Transoesophageal echocardiography provides a more detailed 3D image, while cardiac MRI is relatively effective in differentiating a cardiac mass.2 FDG-PET/CT has an...
increasing role, helping to differentiate between malignant and non-malignant cardiac lesions. At 6 months post initial diagnosis, the right atrial mass had not responded to anticoagulation, therefore behaving more like a non-malignant cardiac tumour rather than a thrombus. Cardiac imaging initially suggested otherwise, evidenced by low grades of 18F-FDG uptake on PET/CT and no discernible contrast enhancement on CTPA. Rarer tumours such as a cardiac papillary fibroelastoma and rhabdomyosarcoma were unlikely differential diagnoses, since the former is typically located on the valvular endocardium while the latter affects a younger demographic. In this case, diagnostic ambiguity remained and tissue histopathology was required to confirm the diagnosis of atrial myxoma despite appropriate imaging (figure 3).

Twitter James Steven Tomlinson @jamiesteventom1

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ORCID iDs
James Steven Tomlinson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8815-0518
Selina Khan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0804-0248

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