Severe mediastinitis caused by an infected bronchogenic cyst

Evangelos Koliakos,1 Evangelos Kalogiannis,2 Stefano Gussago,2 Michel Christodoulou1

SUMMARY
Bronchogenic cysts (BCs) are congenital foregut malformations and usually asymptomatic, thin-walled, incidentally diagnosed cysts which can be easily resected by a minimal invasive approach at this time point. However, they may develop symptoms such as infection, bleeding or compression of adjacent structures. There is no consensus about the risk of developing complications during a lifetime; however, recent reports suggest a higher incidence than initially believed. Here, we report a case of severe life-threatening mediastinitis emerging from an infected BC requiring complex surgery, which could have been avoided if surgery had been performed at an early, asymptomatic stage.

BACKGROUND
Bronchogenic cysts (BCs) are rare congenital malformations arising during development of the embryonic foregut and represent the most frequent primary malformations of the mediastinum.1–3 They are usually located in the mediastinum but can be situated intrapulmonary in 15%–25% of cases.1–4 5 The majority of BC are diagnosed incidentally; however, symptoms may occur during a lifetime in the context of BC-related complications such as infection, haemorrhage or local extension and compression of adjacent structures. Associated malignancy has also rarely been reported.2 It is generally agreed that symptomatic or complicated cysts should be completely resected.2–4 However, the management of asymptomatic BC remains controversial despite growing evidence that BC-related complications are probably more common and severe than initially anticipated.1–4 6 While asymptomatic, thin-walled BC can be easily resected by use of video-assisted thoracic surgery (VATS), whereas surgery for complicated BC may be more complex and less likely achieved by VATS. Here we report a case of severe mediastinitis related to an infected BC localised in the aortopulmonary window which required urgent and extensive surgery in order to control infection. This case report supports existing literature that BC should be resected with minimally invasive techniques before major surgery is required to treat BC-related life-threatening complications.1–3 6–8

INVESTIGATIONS
A chest CT scan revealed a 70×90×110 mm sized, heterogeneous lesion located in the left anterior mediastinum with extensive adjacent mediastinal fat infiltration and pneumomediastinum, suggesting the presence of mediastinitis (figure 1). A thorough anamnesis revealed a pulmonary infection treated with antibiotics almost 20 years ago which, on research, turned out to be related to an infected BC located in the aortopulmonary window. A transthoracic echocardiogram revealed an extracardiac mass with signs of compression of the left ventricle. Bronchoscopy was without pathological findings, and bronchoalveolar lavage was negative for infection or malignancy.

TREATMENT
An empirical intravenous antibiotic treatment was initiated. However, the evolution was marked by the presence of ongoing mediastinitis with persistent dyspnoea, fever, oxygen dependence, elevation of inflammatory biomarkers, and the development of confusion and hallucinations. As a consequence, surgical debridement of the involved mediastinum with resection of the cyst was performed. Taking into consideration the size of the cyst and the extension of mediastinitis, an open approach via a left hemiclamshell incision was performed.

OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP
The postoperative course was uneventful with removal of chest tubes and hospital discharge on postoperative days 4 and 7, respectively. The patient was then transferred to a pulmonary rehabilitation clinic. He was followed up for 3 months postoperatively and presented an uneventful recovery. The histological examination of the surgical specimen confirmed the diagnosis of purulent mediastinitis related to an infected BC arising from the aortopulmonary window (figure 2).

DISCUSSION
Due to the wide use of radiological imaging, an increasing number of BC have been diagnosed in recent years.1–3 6 Chest CT scans usually reveal a thin-walled cyst adjacent to the tracheobronchial tree in the upper mediastinum and occasionally in the lung, and usually offer sufficient information for the diagnosis and treatment of BC. However, BC may contain protein-rich liquid which may mimic
Bronchogenic cysts (BCs) are congenital foregut malformations which are usually asymptomatic. When incidentally discovered, they can be easily resected by a minimally invasive approach.

BCs tend to grow over time and symptoms may appear in the context of cyst-related complications such as infection, haemorrhage or local extension and compression of adjacent structures. Associated malignancy has also been rarely reported.

Complicated BCs could be challenging to manage and usually require more extensive surgery with a higher rate of postoperative complications.

We encourage an upfront surgical treatment of even asymptomatic BCs using minimally invasive techniques when possible.

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Case reports provide a valuable learning resource for the scientific community and can indicate areas of interest for future research. They should not be used in isolation to guide treatment choices or public health policy.

REFERENCES