Endoscopic closure of a 6-cm long esophageal defect with tracheoesophageal fistula

A 68-year-old man with metastatic esophageal adenocarcinoma previously treated with esophagectomy and chemoradiation presented with new-onset dysphagia and cough. A recent good response to chemotherapy resulted in shrinkage of a 7-cm mediastinal metastasis. Chest computed tomography revealed a large esophageal defect. A barium swallow confirmed the presence of a tracheoesophageal fistula (TEF). Upper endoscopy showed a 6-cm defect on the anterior esophageal wall with a clear opening into the trachea (Fig. 1, Video 1).

An upper gastroscope was advanced to the esophagojejunostomy. A 0.035-inch guidewire was passed through the scope and coiled within the jejunum. The scope was withdrawn while maintaining the position of the wire and a double-channel endoscope was fitted with an endoscopic suturing device. The defect was closed using two running sutures, with an average of 5 bites per suture. Immediately after suturing, the patient's capnography improved significantly. Subsequently, a 23 mm × 12 cm fully covered self-expandable metal stent was successfully placed, with the proximal flange positioned at 2 cm above the esophageal defect and just distal to the upper esophageal sphincter (Fig. 2). The esophageal stent was secured with two sutures (Fig. 3). A subsequent esophagram showed no extravasation of contrast (Fig. 4). The patient tolerated an oral diet and was discharged home in a good condition.

TEF is a rare yet life-threatening condition that develops in up to 5% of patients with esophageal malignancy [1]. Management is challenging, and closure often requires a multidisciplinary approach and is associated with high rates of recurrence [2]. Surgery is associated with extremely high morbidity, and endoscopic therapy has been proposed as a minimally invasive and relatively safe modality that improves the quality of life in patients with TEF [3, 4]. The current case demonstrates that very large esophageal defects and fistulae can be successfully closed using a multi-modality approach of endoscopic suturing and stent placement.
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