The challenge of fistula closure in Crohn’s disease: an endoscopic technique for closure of a fistula

Crohn’s disease is associated with many intestinal complications, such as stenosis and fistula, and many cases require intestinal resection during the course of the disease. Although anti-tumor necrosis factor α (TNFα) agents are effective in inducing remission of active Crohn’s disease, they are ineffective for certain intestinal complications, such as fistulas [1]. We attempted endoscopic closure for a patient in whom anti-TNFα agents were not effective in treating the fistula. The patient was a 52-year-old man with ileal- and colonic-type Crohn’s disease who was receiving maintenance treatment with infliximab. He had been experiencing sudden bowel movements and watery stool for several years owing to a cecal–sigmoid fistula that had not closed with infliximab treatment. Colonoscopy revealed a cecal–sigmoid fistula that allowed a 10.8-mm endoscope to be passed through it (▶Fig. 1).

We obtained informed consent from the patient and attempted endoscopic closure of this fistula (▶Fig. 2; ▶Video 1). An endoscopic purse-string suture with a nylon loop and clips was placed using a two-channel scope. Although complete closure was not achieved, the fistula...
shrank and the patient’s subjective symptoms markedly improved (▶ Fig. 3). The efficacy of anti-TNFα agents for fistulas in Crohn’s disease is limited, and the number of fistulas is a predictor of the closure rate [2]. In recent years, endoscopic purse-string sutures and endoscopic closure using over-the-scope clips (OTSCs) have been applied not only to massive gastrointestinal perforations during endoscopic submucosal dissection, but also to intestinal fistulas, enterocutaneous fistulas, and gastric fistulas, among others [3 – 5].

This is the first report of endoscopic fistula closure in a patient with Crohn’s disease. Asymptomatic internal fistulas can be followed up, but for patients with Crohn’s disease who have symptomatic fistulas, such as the one reported here, endoscopic fistula closure is a minimally invasive procedure and should be considered as a viable treatment option.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Endoscopy 2021; 53: E55–E57
DOI 10.1055/a-1173-8540
ISSN 0013-726X
published online 19.6.2020
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Georg Thieme Verlag KG, Rüdigerstraße 14, 70469 Stuttgart, Germany

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