Effective management of a retropharyngeal abscess using endoscopic complete-layer resection and drainage

Retropharyngeal abscess, a rare complication of foreign body ingestion that is usually associated with trauma to the retropharyngeal wall [1, 2], is also a life-threatening medical and surgical emergency, which usually requires incision and drainage [3]. Foreign bodies such as fish bones are the most common traumatic cause of retropharyngeal abscess [4]. We present a case to illustrate endoscopic complete-layer resection with drainage as a safe and effective method of treating retropharyngeal abscesses.

A 72-year-old man presented with fever and pain on swallowing for 2 days; the patient had swallowed a fish bone 20 days earlier. Computed tomography showed a retropharyngeal abscess (Fig. 1). Gastroscopy revealed swollen left retropharyngeal tissue and a white pus point (Fig. 2a). Advancing the gastroscope through the left pharyngeal and piriform fossa was difficult (Video 1). A large volume of pus was drained following the dissection of the pus point with a dual knife. Following the near-complete outflow of pus, an insulation-tipped knife was used to dissect the entire thickness of the swollen tissue, expose the abscess cavity, and ensure complete drainage. The abscess cavity contained minimal pus (Fig. 2b). A nasogastric tube was placed into the stomach to provide enteral nutrition.

Fig. 1 Computed tomography image, showing left retropharyngeal abscess with suspected separated diaphragm.

Fig. 2 Endoscopic view. a Pus point on the retropharyngeal abscess. b Exposed abscess cavity after endoscopic complete-layer resection.

Fig. 3 Computed tomography. a Image 2 days after intervention, showing completely drained left retropharyngeal abscess. b Image 2 weeks after intervention, showing normal retropharyngeal tissue.
Computed tomography on postintervention Day 2 revealed an empty abscess cavity (▶ Fig. 3a). Computed tomography 2 weeks after intervention revealed normal left retropharyngeal tissue (▶ Fig. 3b).

Endoscopy_UCTN_Code_TTT_1AS_2AG

Funding

The Project of Bureau of Science & Technology Nanchong City 225QQT0401
Key Research and Development Projects of Sichuan Provincial Department of Science and Technology

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Endoscopy 2023; 55: E1182–E1183
DOI 10.1055/a-2197-9172
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Georg Thieme Verlag KG, Rüdigerstraße 14, 70469 Stuttgart, Germany

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