Rupture of a suspected pancreatic lymphoepithelial cyst causing chemical peritonitis after endoscopic ultrasound guided-fine needle aspiration

Endoscopic ultrasound (EUS)-guided fine needle aspiration (FNA) is considered a safe technique not only for solid lesions but also for cystic lesions of the pancreas [1].

A 69-year-old man with elevated serum carbohydrate antigen (CA) 19–9 levels (205 U/mL) was referred for investigation of a lesion in the head of his pancreas. Computed tomography (CT) revealed an 8-cm, well-demarcated, low-density lesion that was compatible with a cystic lesion (Fig. 1). T2-weighted magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), however, showed heterogeneous intensities within the lesion, although the intensity is lower than that of a renal cyst (Fig. 2).

Endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) demonstrated a pancreatic parenchyma-like echo appearance with no echolucent area (Fig. 3). Abnormal uptake of 18F-fluorodeoxyglucose (FDG) was also identified (Fig. 4), and a neoplasm derived from the pancreatic parenchyma was suspected. EUS-FNA was performed through the duodenal bulb using a 22-gauge needle (EchoTip; Cook Medical, Winston Salem, North Carolina, USA), and the tissue obtained revealed abundant keratinized substances (Fig. 5). The patient developed moderate fever 2 days after the EUS-FNA, and 2 weeks later, he felt diffuse abdominal pain. A further CT scan demonstrated a large amount of fluid in his abdominal cavity, and a drain was inserted (Fig. 6). The drained fluid was thick and yellowish-white, with extremely high levels of white blood cells (129,750 per μL), amylase (86,550 U/mL), and CA19-9 (4410 U/mL). These findings strongly suggested rupture of a pancreatic lymphoepithelial cyst [2]. Despite administration of painkillers and antibiotics, he continued to have abdominal pain for 2 weeks, at which time the drainage stopped. Following recovery from this event, his pancreatic lesion remained unchanged in size, at 2 cm, over the next 2 years.

Lymphoepithelial cyst is a rare pancreatic disease [2] that is sometimes seen as a heterogeneous solid mass on EUS [3]. As in the current case, diagnosis by imaging is difficult; however, the pathological and biochemical findings of the cyst aspirate are highly diagnostic [2, 3]. Complications after EUS-FNA of pancreatic cystic lesions are infrequent (2%–5%) [1], but do include serious problems such as hemoabdomen, pancreatic ascites [4], tumor seeding [5], and, as in this case, chemical peritonitis.

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Fig. 4 Positron-emission tomography (PET) scan showing abnormal uptake of ¹⁸F-fluorodeoxyglucose (FDG) at the pancreatic head (SUVmax 4.22; arrow).

Fig. 5 Histology of the fine needle aspiration specimen showing keratinized tissues with a small fragment of epithelial tissue (arrow; hematoxylin and eosin [H&E] stain, magnification × 40).

Fig. 6 Computed tomography (CT) scan performed 2 weeks later, after the patient developed abdominal pain, showing the tube that was inserted to drain the abdominal fluid that had leaked out from the ruptured pancreatic cyst causing chemical peritonitis.