Overtube and over-the-wire, through-the-scope balloon-assisted ERCP in a patient with complex hypopharyngeal stenosis after neck surgery

A 64-year-old man with T2N0 squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue base underwent treatment with radiation, followed by glossolaryngectomy, bilateral neck dissection, and placement of an anterolateral thigh flap graft. After 1 year, he presented with acute cholangitis (abdominal pain, jaundice, fever, chills, and hypotension), making emergency endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) mandatory. A computed tomographic scan of the neck showed hypopharyngeal stenosis and neck swelling as a result of the previous surgery (Fig. 1a, Video 1). At another institution, emergency ERCP had failed, and the patient was transferred to our institution for further treatment.

On standard esophagogastroduodenoscopy, the changes due to the prior com-
plex radiation and surgery of the hypopharynx and the hypopharynx were evident. The hypopharynx was stenotic and fibrosed. A hairy skin graft and a voice valve were present (Fig. 1b). Although the gastroscope could be passed into the stomach without major problems, it was impossible to advance a side-viewing duodenoscope. Therefore, using a standard gastroscope, we carefully placed an overtube (Guardus overtube-esophageal; inner diameter 16.7 mm, outer diameter 19.9 mm; US Endoscopy, Mentor, Ohio, USA) (Fig. 1c). The inner overtube was removed, and the outer overtube was left in situ. The presence of the overtube permitted passage of the side-viewing ERCP scope, preventing damage and laceration of the stenotic graft and voice apparatus (Video 1).

A wire-guided, through-the-scope balloon (Hercules, 10-11-12 mm; Cook Medical, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA) was used to dilate the stenosis gently and serve as a guide and pathfinder for the scope. Under combined fluoroscopic and endoscopic visualization, the scope was gently pushed behind the inflated balloon and advanced beyond the stenosis, and the ERCP was then conducted in standard fashion (Fig. 1d). A sphincterotomy with stone removal was accomplished successfully, the patient's condition improved rapidly, and he was discharged in stable condition 2 days later.

This case demonstrates the life-saving use of an overtube to perform emergency ERCP in the setting of a hypopharyngeal–upper esophageal stricture and cholangitis. To the best of our knowledge, we are not aware of any report describing a similar technique of overtube and over-the-wire, through-the-scope balloon-assisted ERCP. The large-diameter overtube served as a “giant working channel,” permitting passage of a side-viewing duodenoscope. The overtube served two purposes: (i) bridging the stenosis and (ii) straightening the oropharyngeal–esophageal channel, which allowed the unrestricted and safe passage of a duodenoscope. The balloon served as a guide, dilator, and “pathfinder.” Therefore, this life-saving technique of overtube and over-the-wire, through-the-scope balloon-assisted ERCP should be added to the armamentarium of the therapeutic endoscopist.

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Sandhya Mudumbi, Esraa Esmat Mohamed, Paul T. Kröner, Lucia C. Fry, Kondal R. Kyanam Kabir Baig, Klaus Mönkemüller
Basil I. Hirschowitz Endoscopic Center of Excellence, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama, USA

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Corresponding author
Klaus Mönkemüller, MD, PhD, FASGE
Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology
Basil I. Hirschowitz Endoscopic Center of Excellence
Endoscopy Unit, JT 664
619 19th Street S
Birmingham, AL 35249
USA
Fax: +1-205-297-9411
klaus1@uab.edu

Video 1
Overtube and over-the-wire, through-the-scope balloon-assisted endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography in a patient with complex hypopharyngeal stenosis after neck surgery.