Deep endoscopic submucosal dissection of a refractory tracheoesophageal fistula using clip-and-line traction: a successful closure

Chronic tracheoesophageal fistula is a rare disease presenting a therapeutic challenge. Unlike the case with most digestive fistulas, drainage with a pigtail stent [1] is not possible.

We present here the case of a 47-year-old man referred for a chronic 2-mm tracheoesophageal fistula (23 cm from mouth) of unknown cause. His past history revealed several pulmonary infections since childhood.

Several endoscopic treatments were attempted with clip closure and then hot biopsy forceps abrasion of the surrounding mucosa, but complete closure was not obtained. We therefore proposed endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) of the surrounding mucosa, namely a 1-cm mucosal patch (▶Fig. 1 and ▶Fig. 2, ▶Video 1) centered on the fistula, as previously described [2].

The patient underwent tracheal intubation with balloon placement just under the fistula. To allow deep dissection of the fistula tract we added a clip-and-line traction (▶Fig. 3) [3] to pull the fistula tract.
out of the wall. The fistula tract was then sectioned at the deepest possible point. Finally, we closed the resected area with four clips anchored into the submucosa (▶ Fig. 4a, b). A radiographic check was done at the end of the endoscopic procedure, and opacification showed no sign of fistula in the tracheal tract. The patient’s course was rapidly favorable, without pain and with disappearance of aspiration coughing. At 2 months, radiographic monitoring with opacification showed no residual fistula. The last clinical follow-up after 4 months confirmed complete resolution of the coughing and aspiration.

Currently the management of tracheoesophageal fistula is not well codified [4], and the role of endoscopy is not defined. Endoscopic abrasion with argon plasma and stents are not very effective with a cure rate of only 53% [5]. ESD might be a good option to reduce scarring and to allow definitive resolution of these fistulas.

Competing interests

None

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References

Fig. 4 End of the procedure for closure of tracheoesophageal fistula. a Endoscopic appearance, with four clips. b Radiographic view showing the clips. c Appearance at radiographic check 2 months later.