Removal of embedded biliary uncovered self-expandable metal stents (uSEMS) is regarded as difficult or even impossible when the duration of indwell exceeds a couple of weeks, because of the ingrowth of tissue [1–3]. The presence of diffuse and severe ingrowth is the main feature limiting SEMS removal [1]. In the esophagus, placement of a self-expanding plastic stent (SEPS) inside the SEMS has been shown to induce pressure necrosis of this tissue hyperplasia, allowing subsequent removal of the stent [4]. We applied this technique in a 58-year-old patient with a history of alcohol abuse, obstructive jaundice, and suspected malignancy, in whom an uSEMS 10 mm wide and 6 cm long (Wallflex; Boston Scientific, Natick, Massachusetts, USA) had been mistakenly inserted more than 1 year before. The patient had experienced recurrent cholangitis due to stent obstruction caused by tissue ingrowth. Stent removal was therefore considered, but was unsuccessful using conventional maneuvers. A covered SEMS (Wallflex) was then placed inside the uSEMS (Figs. 1, 2).

The patient developed acute cholecystitis and a liver abscess, needing percutaneous drainage and prolonged antibiotic therapy. Four weeks later, after resolution of the sepsis, removal of both stents was attempted but failed due to persistent tissue ingrowth. A new covered SEMS was inserted for another 4-week period. Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography showed spontaneous migration of the covered stent and disappearance of the tissue hyperplasia, except at the distal end of the metal stent (Fig. 3).

Removal of the uncovered stent was, however, easy using a rat-tooth forceps (Fig. 4). Damage to the bile duct was checked using SpyGlass (Boston Scientific), which showed permeability and no residual stricture (Fig. 5).

Removal of biliary uncovered SEMS is less successful than removal of covered stents (0–38% vs. 92%). We previously reported on piecemeal extraction of double uncovered Wallstents in a laborious procedure [5]. More recently we applied the “covered-stent-in-uncovered-stent” technique described for removal of esophageal SEMS in the biliary tree and showed that a period of 6–8 weeks might be appropriate for successful and less time-consuming removal.

Competing interests: None

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Corresponding author

P. H. Deprez, MD, PhD
Gastroenterology
Cliniques Universitaires Saint-Luc
Université Catholique de Louvain
Av. Hippocrate 10
1200 Brussels
Belgium
Fax: +32-2-7648927
pdeprez@uclouvain.be