Surgical Treatment of Lumbosacral Pseudarthrosis and Spondyloptosis in a Patient with Neurofibromatosis Type 1 and a Large Lumbar Anterior Meningocele. Case Report and Review of the Literature

Benjamin Brokinkel¹ Juliane Schroeteler¹ Bernd Kasprzak² Angela Brentrup¹ Christian Ewelt¹ Walter Stummer¹ Mark Klingenhoefer¹

¹Department of Neurosurgery, Universitätsklinikum Münster, Münster, Germany
²Clinic for Vascular and Endovascular Surgery, University Hospital Münster, Münster, Germany

Address for correspondence: Benjamin Brokinkel, MD, Departement of Neurosurgery, University Hospital Münster, Albert-Schweitzer-Campus 1, Building A1, 48149 Münster, Germany (e-mail: benjamin.brokinkel@ukmuenster.de).

Abstract

Background Lumbar anterior meningocele (MC) is rare in patients with neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1). Although spinal fusion with maximum possible resection of the cele might be indicated in these special cases, reports describing operative procedures are lacking.

Clinical Presentation We present a young woman with NF1 and lower back pain due to lumbar anterior MC, extensive osteolysis, and deformation of the lumbar spine. After Harrington spondylodesis from T12 to S1 in 1989, she developed lumbosacral pseudarthrosis and transcutaneous migration of the spondylodesis. Thus the left pole of the spondylodesis was shortened below the level of L5 in 2005. Years later, the patient presented with lower back pain and wound infection. Imaging revealed the MC and avulsion of the right S1 screw with lumbosacral pseudarthrosis and spondyloptosis, and transcutaneous migration of the right spondylodesis pole. Three-stage surgery was indicated with explantation of the Harrington system in the first step and posterior fusion from T10 to S2 in the second step. Finally, vertebral resection, gathering of the cele, and implantation of a customized titanium cage was achieved through an anterior transabdominal approach. Postoperatively, the patient reported sufficient reduction of lower back pain.

Conclusions Lumbar anterior MC is rare in patients with NF1 and may cause spinal instability. When surgery is indicated, long-range spinal fusion and reduction of the cele should be considered. Surgery may be challenging requiring a staged operative procedure and an interdisciplinary collaboration.
Introduction

Neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1) is one of the most frequent neurocutaneous disorders, presenting with multivarious central nervous and osseous malformations including spine deformity or meningoceles (MC). Although MC and myelomeningoceles (MMC) predominantly occur posteriorly, numerous case reports also describe anterior manifestations of MC/MMC along the cervical and thoracic spine. Compared with those, descriptions of anterior lumbar MC/MMC in patients with NF1 are considerably more infrequent with only very few published cases so far. Besides congenital deformation, it is believed that continuous pulsatile pressure of the thecal sac presumably stresses the adjacent bone and therefore leads to osteolysis and subsequent deformity and instability of the vertebrae. Although spinal instrumentation without underlying MC/MMC as well as resection of anterior celes without spondylodesis in patients with NF1 was previously described, to our knowledge spondylodesis for spinal instability and deformity with surgery for underlying MC/MMC has not yet been published. We report here on the surgical treatment of a female NF1 patient with a lumbar spine deformity and anterior MC presenting with lower back pain.

Case Report

In 1989, a 16-year-old young woman was initially subjected to surgery due to severe lower back pain and lumbar lordotic deformation and an anterior MC. The diagnosis of von Recklinghausen disease had already been established in childhood based on the typical clinical stigmata. At that time, treatment included lumbar Harrington spondylodesis ranging from T12 to S1 but excluded gathering or resection of the cele. Although the back pain initially improved steadily after the operation, the patient developed secondary lumbosacral pseudarthrosis. Due to progressive spondyloptosis, the left pole of the Harrington spondylodesis induced late-onset disturbance of wound healing and ultimately transcutaneous migration and subsequent wound infection. Thus the left pole of the fixateur was shortened below L5 in 2005. Although wound healing had partially been achieved, in 2013 the patient finally presented in our department with progressive lower back pain and sacral skin perforation caused by the caudal part of the right pole of the Harrington fixateur (Fig. 1). Radiographic imaging revealed a marked spine deformation due to lumbosacral pseudarthrosis and lordotic spondyloptosis of the hypoplastic lumbar vertebrae, which were largely osteolytic and tilted ventrally toward the lesser pelvis despite the fixateur (Fig. 1). Spondyloptosis was considered progressive comparing the current scans with computed tomography (CT) scans from 2008 (Fig. 2 A, B). The Harrington fixateur, however, was shown to be deficient due to the removal of the left-sided sacral screw and evulsion of the right S1 screw. Additional magnetic resonance imaging depicted the large anterior MC prolapsing through an osseous defect of the scarce remnants of the lumbar vertebrae into the lesser pelvis (Fig. 3 A, B). Because spondyloptosis was considered progressive and the inlaying fixateur as insufficient and infested, we planned a three-stage surgical revision.

Surgical Technique

After removal of the fixateur interne in a first step and a 3-week course of antibiotics, the patient was subjected to dorsal stabilization under neurophysiologic monitoring. Regarding clearly reduced subcutaneous soft tissue due to cachexia, the...
decision was made to use a low-profile fixateur. Intraopera-
tively, cranial fixation was performed with bilateral pedicle
screws from T10 to L1 (►Fig. 2C). A left-sided S2 screw could
not be placed due to osseous instability of the sacrum, and
stability was finally achieved using a transversal pole connect-
ing the left with the right sacral screws. Pseudarthrosis was
further treated by the implantation of 12 mg recombinant
bone morphogenetic protein-2 as well as autologous bone
flakes mixed with tricalcium phosphate. About 3 weeks later,
access to the anterior MC and lumbar spine was achieved
through an anterior transabdominal approach under neu-
rophysiologic monitoring in a collaborative operation with a
vascular surgeon. After resection of vertebrae L2, L3, L4, and
partially L5, the MC was mobilized and subsequently gathered
at its median parts. However, because the wall of the cele
appeared to consist solely of a thin arachnoid layer and was
therefore hardly stitchable, we decided not to perform com-
plete resection to minimize the risk of a large cerebrospinal
fluid fistula but reconstructed ventral parts of the dural sleeve
with layers of TachoSil (Takeda Pharmaceuticals International,
Zurich, Switzerland), DuraSeal (Covidien, Dublin, Ireland), and
Tutopatch (Bess Medizintechnik, Berlin, Germany). Subse-
quently, a customized oval, slightly lordotic titanium mesh
(100 × 17 × 22 mm) was implanted (►Figs. 2D, 3C, and 4).

After the final operation, due to intraoperative dural
incision, 7 days of bed rest were prescribed, and the patient
recovered well without any focal neurologic deficit. Wound
healing was unremarkable, and lower back pain was reduced
to a minimum at the time of discharge to neurophysiologic
rehabilitation. At clinical presentation 3 months after surgery,
the patient was mobile without neurologic deficits and
considerably reduced low back pain and was looking forward
to integration into employment.

**Discussion**

Anterior MC and MMC occasionally occur in patients with NF1
and are predominantly in a thoracic location, whereas
lumbar location is uncommon and has only been described in
two patients. In non-NF1 patients, although cases of ante-
rior celes along the thoracolumbar and sacral spine have
been published, reports about MC restricted to the lumbar
spine are lacking. Due to their anatomical location, anterior
celes often prolapse into the thoracic and abdominal visceral
cavities and can therefore remain asymptomatic. Apart
from this, clinical manifestation of anterior thoracolumbar or
sacral MC can be manifold and include, for example, abdomi-
nal and lower back pain, infertility, bladder retention, consti-
pation, or purulent meningitis. Although commonly regarded as a defect in neural tube formation, there is still
uncertainty concerning the etiology of anterior celes of the
caudal parts of the spine and their frequently associated
osseous malformations. As a possibly underlying mechanism,
continuous pulse synchronous stress caused by the cele is
assumed to induce erosion and subsequent lysis and defor-
mation of the underlying bony structures of the spine, causing
variable size osseous defects.\textsuperscript{9} Thus it is certainly conceivable that occurrence of an anterior MC/MMC with attended osseous malformation could affect the shape and stability of the involved spine segments. Surgery for symptomatic sacral anterior celes is advised in numerous reports with a large variety of surgical procedures (e.g., laparoscopic, posterior [through a sacral laminectomy], or through anterior transabdominal approaches).\textsuperscript{9,13,15} Surgical procedures in these cases exclusively deal with isolation and resection of the thecal sac. Conversely, although spinal instrumentation in the case of deformity in NF1 patients has been published,\textsuperscript{10,11,16} descriptions about underlying MC/MMC are lacking. A literature search revealed one report from Ebara et al describing a 59-year-old patient with NF1 who received both resection of an intrathoracic MC and extensive posterior fusion. Presenting with severe dyspnea, resection of the cele was initially performed through a wide laminectomy from T2 to T5. Because the patient subsequently developed neurologic deterioration due to spinal instability, spondylolysis was finally indicated from C3 to L2. In contrast to our case, the authors considered extended laminectomy as the cause of the spinal instability in their case.\textsuperscript{2}

**Conclusion**

Anterior lumbar MC is rarely observed in both NF1 and non-NF1 patients. Although pathogenesis is not fully understood, in severe cases celes are assumed to cause osteolysis due to the pulsatile erosion of the adjacent bone. Because this may lead to instability with spondyloptosis and subsequent deformity, surgery should aim at spinal reconstitution with stabilization and, if possible, gathering or resection of the cele. Depending on the approach and extent of surgery, we advise a multistaged procedure in an interdisciplinary collaboration.

**References**