Dysphagia due to kyphosis-induced positional changes of the carotid artery

We have recently encountered numerous patients with age-related aberrations of the carotid artery [1–4]. This pathological condition is also a suspected risk factor for ischemic stroke [2–4] and has not been identified during previous physical examinations [3,4].

A 78-year-old man was referred to our otorhinolaryngology clinic because of an unusual, strange sensation in his throat with dysphagia. The sensation had continued for 1 week. He had a history of dilated cardiomyopathy and had been taking warfarin to prevent arterial coagulation and other medications for the treatment of hypertension and atherosclerosis. His height, which had previously been 173 cm, was 168 cm at the time of our examination as a result of cervical kyphosis associated with ageing. The patient’s neck had shortened because of habitual forward bending of the head, and that posture was associated with height loss.

Using a new folding pharyngeal scope [5], we found an aberration of the internal carotid artery in the left posterior pharyngeal wall. The pulsing of the aberrant artery was synchronized with the patient’s heartbeat (see Video 1, which was taken with the new pharyngeal scope). The unusual strange sensation around the pharynx resulted from a separation of the pharyngeal wall, which contains the mucosa, submucosa, and superior pharyngeal constrictor muscle, because of the aberration of the internal carotid artery. When he was lying in the supine position without a pillow, the patient’s bent posture disappeared and the aberration of the internal carotid artery in the pharyngeal wall resolved completely.

The new pharyngeal scope is an effective diagnostic tool in such cases.

Endoscopy_UCTN_Code_CCL_1AB_2AB

Competing interests: None

Koichi Tsunoda1,2, Takeshi Wakahayashi1, Junzo Takeda3

1 Department of Artificial Organs and Medical Device Creation, National Hospital Organization, Tokyo Medical Center, Tokyo, Japan
2 Department of Otolaryngology, National Hospital Organization, Tokyo Medical Center, Tokyo, Japan
3 National Hospital Organization, Tokyo Medical Center, Tokyo, Japan

Acknowledgments

Funding from AMED, Japan is gratefully acknowledged.

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DOI http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-0042-116024
Endoscopy 2016; 48: E300
© Georg Thieme Verlag KG Stuttgart · New York
ISSN 0013-726X

Corresponding author

Koichi Tsunoda
Department of Artificial Organs and Medical Device Creation, and Department of Otolaryngology National Hospital Organization Tokyo Medical Center 2-5-1 Higashigaoka, Meguro-ku Tokyo 152-8902 Japan Fax: +81-3-34110185 tsunodakoichi@kankakuki.go.jp

Tsunoda Koichi et al. Dysphagia due to aberration of the carotid artery... Endoscopy 2016; 48: E300