



## Case Series

# Bowel perforation secondary to metastatic lung cancer: Report of two cases with literature review<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION:** Gastrointestinal metastases from pulmonary neoplasm represent a rare but potentially fatal pathology that can complicate the disease in most advanced stages; this is a rare but well-known phenomenon in Literature and small intestine is the most common metastatic site. Generally these are patients with a known or surgically treated pulmonary neoplasm; the onset of pulmonary neoplastic disease with a symptomatic intestinal metastasis is to be considered extremely rare.

**PRESENTATION OF CASES:** We report two cases of small intestine perforation from pulmonary metastasis; diagnosis was made at the time of exploratory laparotomy and the operation was in one patient the resection of the perforated bowel and in the second a resection and an intestinal bypass to overcome the stenosis caused by the metastatic masses. In the postoperative period, a patient died of pulmonary complications, the second was dismissed, but survival was only three months.

**DISCUSSION:** Intestinal metastasis of a pulmonary tumor is a rare occurrence but must be suspected in acute abdominal syndrome in a patient with a diagnosed pulmonary neoplasia.

**CONCLUSION:** Emergency surgical treatment of abdominal metastases of a lung cancer is mandatory but prognosis is extremely unfavorable.

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## 1. Introduction

Lung cancer is mostly diagnosed at the advanced stage of disease and gastrointestinal metastases from pulmonary neoplasm are rare [1,2] often with few or no symptoms; the incidence is estimated around 2–14% [3] and the first reported case dates back to the 60s [4–6]. Histologically, poor tumor differentiation and advanced T and N stages are associated with intestinal metastasis; clinically, these led to three frequent clinical presentations, perforation, obstruction and bleeding.

Early diagnosis of small intestine metastasis is difficult because of the low incidence of clinically apparent symptoms, but possibility of small bowel metastases should be kept in mind in

patients with lung cancer presenting with an acute abdomen. Intestinal perforation occurs in advanced stages and is usually a sign of widespread disease; aggressive surgery can provide effective palliation and may improve short-term survival, but prognosis is however dismal. The progress of chemotherapy protocols for advanced stages of the disease has raised more cases of this disease [7]; perforation of small intestine by lung cancer metastases is a rare occurrence and is a sign of an advanced disease with a survival that, in most cases, is limited to weeks or a few months [8]. In some cases the onset of an acute abdomen may reveal the presence of the primitive neoplasia [8]. In this paper we report two cases of small bowel perforation from lung cancer metastases; while in a patient the tumor was well known, in the second one abdominal complication revealed the presence of pulmonary cancer. Aim of the present study is to report clinical characteristics and outcomes of the patients treated in authors' hospital for GI metastasis from primary lung cancer, and report and analyse the same data concerning patients retrieved from a literature review. This paper has been reported in line with the PROCESS criteria (). Although small intestinal metastatic tumor from lung cancer is rare, it should be considered when acute abdomen is observed; this group of

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patients present a poor prognosis and the gold standard treatment is not defined. Probably primary lung cancer metastasis to the small bowel are not so rare as it is thought and clinical management and treatment decision will be warranted and considered accordingly. Although uncommon, if lung cancer patients present with anemia and melena, enteric metastasis should be part of the differential diagnosis. Abdominal CT scans and PET-CT are effective for early diagnosis. The prognosis of metastatic spread of solid subtype lung denocarcinoma to the small intestine with mesenteric lymph node metastasis is poor. Subgroups of patients benefitting from metastasectomy and more effective systemic therapy need to be further investigated. The incidence of gastrointestinal metastases from lung cancer is higher than previously thought but clinically significant metastases are rare. Small bowel perforation secondary to metastatic non-small cell lung cancer is a very rare clinical entity.

## 2. Clinical case 1

A 62-year-old woman complaining of abdominal pain starting about 48 h earlier, with nausea and vomiting was admitted to our emergency department. The patient was affected by a non-resectable “Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer” (NSMLC), with diffuse bone metastases; there was also an history of ischemic heart disease. At clinical examination the abdomen was diffusely painful, the Blumberg sign was intensely positive; white blood cells count was  $24,000 \times 10^3$  with marked neutrophilia, hemoglobin 9.6 g / dl, with haematocrit 30.6%. Free air under the diaphragm was present at plain RX abdomen while the CT showed an abscess in the pelvic cavity extending to the left paramedian region, with thickening of the small bowel loops and a bilateral pleural effusion. At laparotomy a diffuse purulent peritonitis was found with presence of multiple ileal masses, one of which was perforated in free peritoneum; a resection of the perforated ileal segment was performed to restore intestinal continuity with latero-lateral mechanical anastomosis. The operative course took place without complications and the patient was dismissed in 15 days. The anatomopathological examination documented the full-thickness invasion of the ileal wall by a neoplastic mass that was diagnosed as a non-small cell lung cancer metastasis by immunohistochemistry.

## 3. Clinical case 2

A 60-year-old man was admitted at our DEA after an ECG showed an inverted T-wave. The patient complained of a productive cough since 3 months; in the history there was a splenectomy at age 12 for unspecified reasons, COPD, alcohol cirrhosis and prostate hypertrophy. Two weeks before the patient had been subjected to the removal of a skin formation of the posterior region of the ear, awaiting for final anatomopathological examination. An echocardiogram and a chest RX showed pericardial and bilateral pleural effusion; chest CT showed adenopathy of mediastinal stations with central hypodensity (maximum diameter 5.5 cm), a nodule of 1 cm at the apical segment of the right lower lobe, confirming bilateral pleural and pericardial infusion. (Fig. 1) Bilateral adrenal hypodense formations were also observed (maximum 6 cm in diameter on the right and 3 cm in the left), as well as adenopathies at the root of mesentery, celiac, interaortocaval and paraortic nodes, with peritoneal carcinomatosis (Fig. 2). The patient was admitted to the Department of Internal Medicine where, after few days, he complained of abdominal pain; the RX abdomen showed air under the diaphragm and so, after pleural (2000cc) and pericardial (800cc) effusion were drained, emergency laparotomy was performed. Perforation of a jejunal mass was found with purulent peritonitis was found; there were also 6 masses in the small intestine wall causing a stenosis and two more in the thickness of the mesentery. A resec-

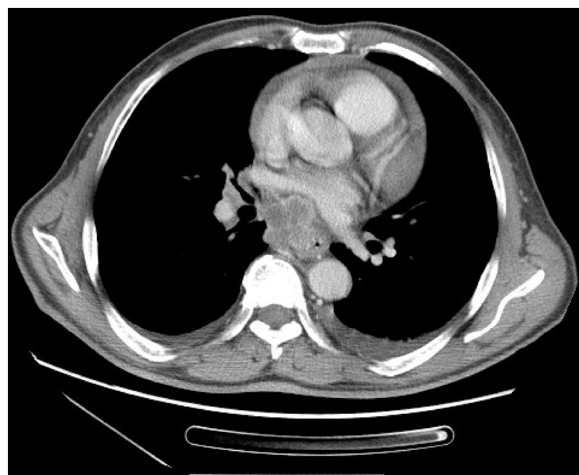


Fig. 1. Lymphadenopathy and pericardial effusion.



Fig. 2. Adrenal metastasis and nodules of peritoneal carcinosis.

tion of the perforated tumor mass and an ileoileic bypass were then performed to overcome intestinal obstruction. The anatomopathological examination of the mass showed a poorly differentiated ulcerated adenocarcinoma (g3) perforated in the visceral peritoneum, with metastasis in 7 regional lymph nodes (pT4N1Mx). The skin formation was a poor differentiated carcinoma metastatic to the skin; in both cases the immunohistochemical analysis confirmed the pulmonary origin of the neoplasia. After ten days of surgery, there was the death of the patient for cardiorespiratory complications.

## 4. Discussion

In the two cases we presented intestinal metastases from a pulmonary neoplasm was a diagnostic surprise at emergency laparotomy; however while in the first patient the cancer was well known, in the second one the abdominal perforation revealed the primitive neoplasm, which already metastasized to the skin. Findings of the imaging were useful to decide for emergency laparotomy but not for the diagnosis of abdominal metastasis. This diagnosis, however, is not easy and requires a high index of suspicion; conventional CT has a low sensitivity for small bowel metastasis (33%) while with intravenous and oral contrast reaches 87% [3,9].

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