

Idiopathic Osteonecrosis of the Third Metacarpal Head

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Osteonecrosis of the metacarpal head is a rare disease entity and there are only a few isolated case reports in the literature. No single modality of treatment can be recommended as ideal. In this report, we describe a patient who presented with changes resembling avascular necrosis at the third metacarpal head of the right hand. It presented as a 2-week history of sudden onset of pain in the region of the right third metacarpophalangeal joint with limitation of flexion. We treated the 51-year-old male patient by curettage, debridement and multiple drilling. At 1-year follow-up, the patient was symptom-free and showed improved range of motion of the metacarpophalangeal joint (0° to 80°). He returned to his original work 2 weeks after the operation without limitation of daily activities. This report presents a new operative treatment that improved the functional outcome of osteonecrosis of the metacarpal head. [*J Formos Med Assoc* 2008;107(1):89–92]

Key Words: curettage, metacarpal head, osteonecrosis

Osteonecrosis of the metacarpal head is a rare disease entity and there are only a few isolated case reports in the literature.^{1–4} It was first reported by Dieterich in 1932.⁵ The symptoms range in severity. Sometimes, it may remain asymptomatic, but it may also be painful and lead to restricted range of motion of the metacarpophalangeal joint. Because of the limited experience with this problem, no single modality of treatment can be recommended as ideal. Although symptoms may resolve with non-operative treatment, progressive collapse of the lesion and subsequent degenerative arthritis is a possible long-term outcome. Curettage of the lesion and supplementary cancellous bone grafting have been reported to provide symptom relief in cases that are resistant to non-operative treatment.

In this report, we describe a patient who presented with changes resembling osteonecrosis of

the metacarpal head of the middle finger of the right hand. We treated the patient by curettage and multiple drilling, which led to significant functional improvement by the time of the 1-year follow-up.

Case Report

A 51-year-old right hand-dominant male businessman presented with a 2-week history of sudden onset of pain in the region of the right middle metacarpophalangeal joint with limitation of flexion. He had no history of any predisposing systemic illness such as autoimmune disease or steroid use. The patient had sustained no previous trauma to the metacarpophalangeal joint.

Clinical examination of the right middle metacarpophalangeal joint revealed mild swelling

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Received: January 10, 2007

Revised: March 19, 2007

Accepted: July 3, 2007

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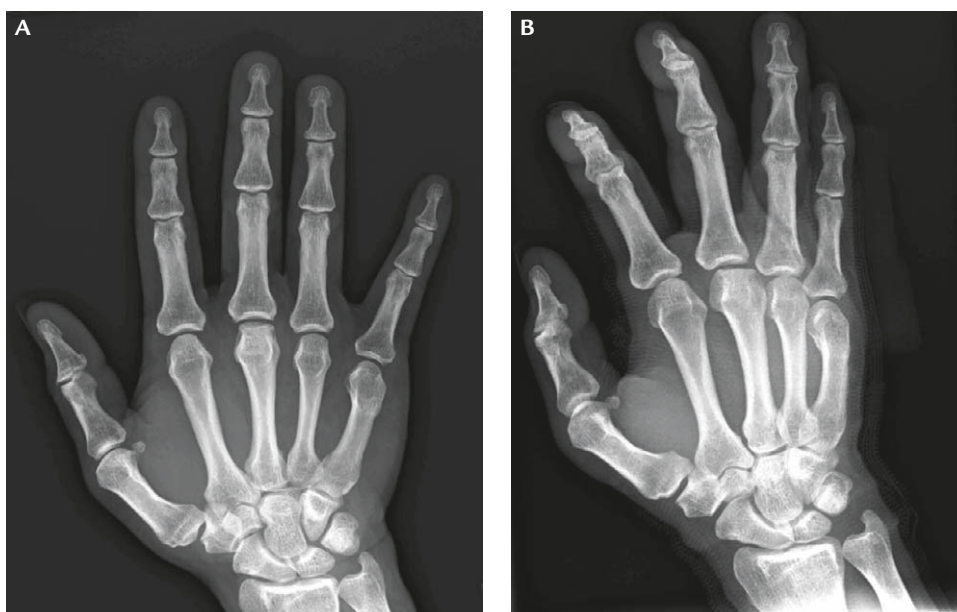


Figure 1. Posteroanterior radiographs of the right hand. (A) Preoperative radiograph shows flattening of the third metacarpal head with oval cystic lesions and sclerotic changes indicating osseous necrosis. (B) Radiograph after curettage and drilling.

without obvious erythema and local heat. The active range of motion of the involved joint was 50° of flexion with an extension lag of 20°. Both active and passive movement of the joint was painful. Screening tests were negative for signs of systemic infection or rheumatologic conditions. Radiographs revealed cystic lesions and sclerosis at the third metacarpal head of the right hand with mild flattening (Figure 1A). The patient was treated initially with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication. However, the symptoms continued to progress and operative treatment was suggested.

Under endotracheal general anesthesia, the patient was placed in supine position. After disinfection and routine draping procedure, a pneumatic tourniquet with 250 mmHg pressure was applied around the right arm. The metacarpal head and neck were exposed subperiosteally after retraction of the extensor digitorum communis tendon through a 3-cm dorsal longitudinal skin incision. Obvious synovitis was found around the affected joint, and cartilage erosion was found at the peripheral area of the joint. Several small pieces of bone–cartilage flap were found inside the affected joint with mild hemarthrosis. Bare

bone at the subchondral area of the third metacarpal head was also noted. We debrided the inflammatory synovium around the joint and the debris inside the joint. Then, the necrotic bone in the subchondral area of the third metacarpal head was curetted. Finally, multiple drilling with 0.16-cm Kirschner wires at the bare bone of the articular surface was performed (Figure 1B). After wound irrigation with normal saline and meticulous hemostasis, the wound was closed in layers. Pathology of the specimen showed dead bone, recognized by its empty lacunae, surrounded by necrotic adipocytes (Figure 2). After the operation, short arm splint was applied for 2 weeks and then full range of motion exercise without limitation was suggested.

At the 1-year follow-up evaluation, the patient had painless range of motion of the metacarpophalangeal joint with 80° flexion and no extension lag. He returned to his original work 2 weeks after the operation without limitation of daily activities (Figure 3). Radiographs showed no evidence of sclerosis or cystic changes in the metacarpal head. Although slight incongruity of the metacarpal head persisted, there was no additional loss of joint space (Figure 4).

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