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Wrap-Around Appearance: An Under-recognized Radiologic Feature of Spinal Lymphoma

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A 71 year old man presented with neck and upper back pain to the emergency department. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the thoracic spine with and without gadolinium demonstrated a T2 vertebral lesion with epidural spinal cord compression (Figure 1). Even though he was neurologically intact, considering the degree of severe spinal cord compression and the absence of a pathological diagnosis, an urgent separation surgery was planned. A frozen section of the tumor from the paraspinal mass during initial exposure confirmed the presence of lymphoma and hence only a T2 laminectomy and decompression was performed. Final pathology was Non-Hodgkin lymphoma and patient was started on appropriate chemotherapy regimen. Careful evaluation of the MRI shows presence of circumferential epidural spinal cord compression along with involvement of the posterior elements in a characteristic "wrap-around" fashion (Figure 1B, C). Recognition of this finding may steer the surgeon toward a differential of spinal lymphoma and its clinical importance cannot be overemphasized. Its identification may either avoid an open surgery that often delays initiation of chemotherapy to allow for wound healing or decrease the magnitude of the surgical procedure by obtaining early frozen section and confirmation of diagnosis if possible.¹ An urgent computed tomography (CT) guided biopsy should be considered in patients who do not have significant deficits regardless of the degree of epidural spinal cord compression in the presence of a wrap-around sign on imaging, as it could be a harbinger of spinal lymphoma that could be treated with chemotherapy alone in the absence of any obvious spinal instability.

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Figure 1. (A) Sagittal and (B, C) axial T1-weighted magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the thoracic spine with gadolinium demonstrates a T2 vertebral lesion with circumferential epidural spinal cord compression and paravertebral involvement (arrows).

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