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Case Report

Tracheal paraganglioma presenting as stridor in a pediatric patient, case report and literature review

Amy L. Dimachkieh[a], Allison Dobbie[a], Damon R. Olson[b], Mark A. Lovell[b], Jeremy D. Prager[a,*]

[a] Department of Pediatric Otolaryngology, Children's Hospital Colorado & University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, United States
[b] Department of Pathology, Children's Hospital Colorado & University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, United States

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To review tracheal paragangliomas and describe the clinical presentation, radiologic findings, operative management, and histologic findings of a pediatric patient who presented with stridor refractory to traditional asthma therapy.

Methods: Chart review of an 8-year-old male who presented to a tertiary care pediatric hospital and literature review of tracheal paragangliomas.

Results: We present the case of an 8-year-old male who presented with new-onset of wheezing and dyspnea on exertion. He was given a new diagnosis of asthma and treated with bronchodilators that failed to improve his symptoms, which progressed over 3 months until he presented urgently with biphasic stridor. Bedside flexible laryngoscopy failed to reveal an etiology. Computed tomography (CT) imaging demonstrated 17 × 12 × 16 mm exophytic mass arising from the posterior membranous trachea with extension of the mass to the border of the thyroid gland and separate from the esophagus. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) angiography confirmed vascular supply from the right thyrocervical trunk and inferior thyroid artery. Rigid microlaryngoscopy revealed a friable vascular polypoid mass 2 cm distal to the vocal folds with 75% obstruction of the airway from which a small biopsy was taken. Pathology confirmed paraganglioma with neuroendocrine cells arranged in "zellballen" architecture and strong immunopositivity for chromogranin and synaptophysin in the neuroendocrine cells and S100 immunopositivity in the sustentacular cells. The patient underwent complete open resection of the tumor including three tracheal rings with primary anastomosis. Final pathology confirmed paraganglioma and negative margins. Genetic screening revealed a succinate dehydrogenase complex subunit C (*SDHC*) germline mutation, confirming hereditary paraganglioma/pheochromocytoma syndrome. He remains well at 3 month follow up without dyspnea or stridor.

Conclusion: Tracheal paragangliomas are exceptionally rare, with 12 reported cases. This is the only pediatric case reported. In pediatric patients with persistent airway complaints, subglottic and tracheal masses and obstruction should be considered. Due to the vascularity and endotracheal component of tracheal paragangliomas, a detailed surgical plan should consider embolization, endotracheal laser photocoagulation and electrocautery, and open surgical resection. Additionally, pediatric patients benefit from a multidisciplinary approach including radiology, endocrinology, and genetic counseling.

1. Introduction

Paragangliomas arise from neural crest elements in the parasympathetic nervous system [1]. In the adrenal system, these lesions are referred to as pheochromocytomas. In the head and neck, these lesions are called paragangliomas, and primarily arise from the carotid body, jugulo-tympanic region, and vagus nerve [2]. Other head and neck locations are infrequently described and paragangliomas of the trachea are exceptionally rare, with 12 reported cases [3,4]. Presenting symptoms of tracheal paragangliomas include hemoptysis, dyspnea, and cough. Full evaluations of patients with paragangliomas include whole body imaging with computed tomography (CT) and/or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) with possible vascular evaluation and magnetic resonance angiography (MRA) of the site of the lesion. Other studies typically include biochemical testing for catecholamines. The role for genetic evaluation is increasing due to recent developments in the understanding of familial paragangliomas and the presence of inheritable germline mutations. The treatment of tracheal

* Corresponding author. Children's Hospital Colorado, B-455, 13123 East 16th Avenue, Aurora, CO 80045, United States.
E-mail address: Jeremy.Prager@childrenscolorado.org (J.D. Prager).

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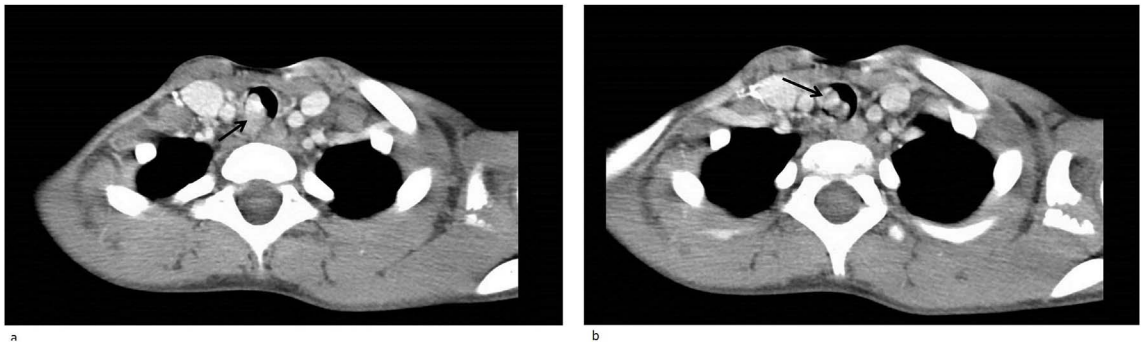

Fig. 1. Axial CT contrast neck indicating tumor arising from membranous trachea with intraluminal exophytic and extratracheal components.

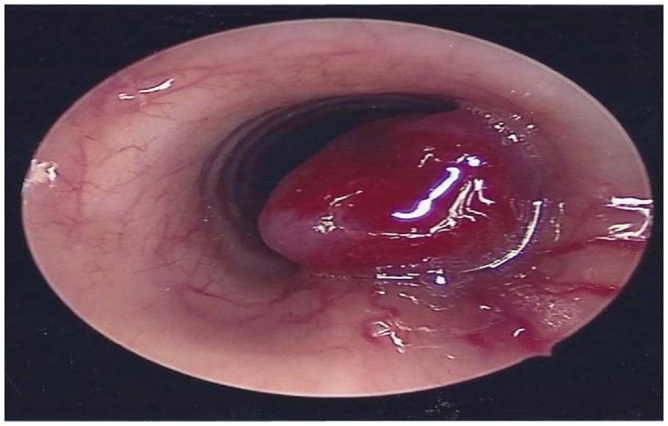

Fig. 2. Intraoperative telescopic examination of the tumor with exophytic, friable, vascular intraluminal component.

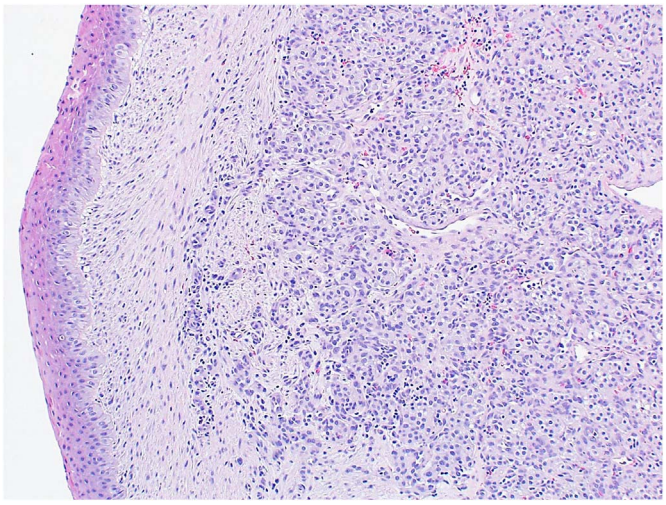

Fig. 4. Proliferation of tumor cells arranged in nests with intervening vascular sinusoids, the characteristic neuroendocrine "zellballen" architecture. The tumor cells have abundant eosinophilic cytoplasm and there is mild to moderate nuclear pleomorphism. The proliferation is subjacent to respiratory epithelium undergoing squamous metaplasia. H&E, 100X magnification.

paragangliomas most commonly includes open surgical excision, endotracheal excision and cautery with consideration of preoperative embolization. Radiation therapy and stereotactic radiosurgery have been used in other head and neck paragangliomas but have not been reported in tracheal paragangliomas [2]. We report the first pediatric case of a tracheal paraganglioma.

2. Case Report

An otherwise healthy 8-year-old male presented to his primary care physician with new-onset wheezing and dyspnea on exertion. He was given a new diagnosis of asthma and treated with bronchodilators that failed to improve his symptoms, which progressed over 3 months until he presented urgently to otolaryngology with biphasic stridor. Bedside flexible laryngoscopy noted normal vocal cord mobility and no etiology for the patient's stridor. Computed tomography (CT) with contrast imaging demonstrated a 17 × 12 × 16 mm exophytic mass arising from the posterior membranous trachea in the right tracheoesophageal groove nestled posteroinferior to the right thyroid lobe (Fig. 1a–b). The mass appeared separate from the esophagus. Operative rigid

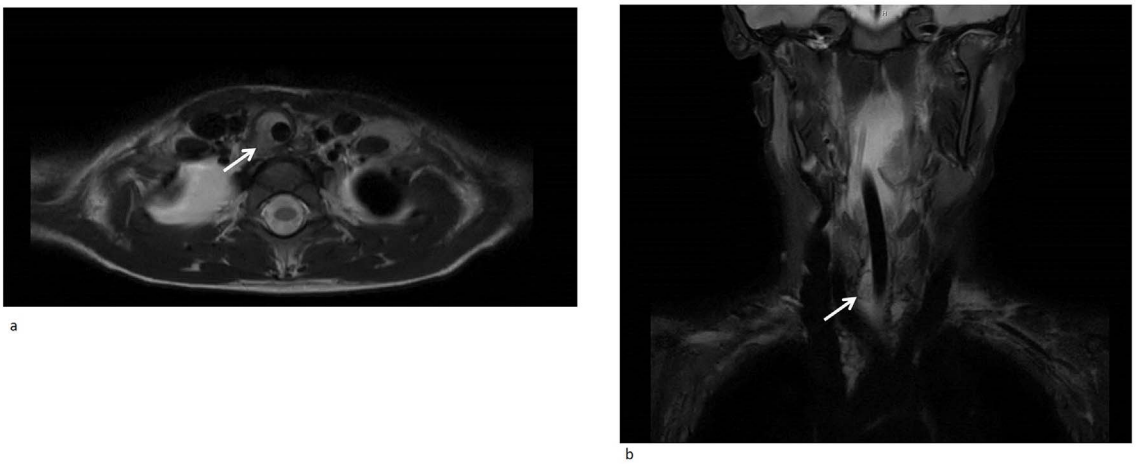

Fig. 3. Axial (a) and coronal (b) T2 MRI of tracheal tumor with extension posteriolaterally into the right tracheoesophageal groove.