CASE REPORT

Pleomorphic adenoma with extensive necrosis: report of two cases

YK Chen1, CC Lin1, S Lai2, CH Chen2, WC Wang1, YR Lin1, SS Hsue1, LM Lin1

1Oral Pathology Department, 2Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department, School of Dentistry, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Pleomorphic adenoma (PA) is the most common neoplasm for both the major and minor salivary glands. While PA is occasionally associated with cystic change or hemorrhage necrosis, spontaneous infarction appears to be very uncommon. We report two unusual cases of extensive necrosis of PA; one occurred in the palate with the necrotic tumor mass slipping into the oral cavity. This phenomenon, possibly associated with incision biopsy, has never been described previously. A second case, arising in the parotid with spontaneous tumor necrosis, poses some dilemma in differential diagnosis.


Keywords: pleomorphic adenoma; tumor necrosis; salivary gland

Introduction

Pleomorphic adenoma (PA) is the most common neoplasm in both the major and minor salivary glands; for major gland, PA is the most frequently occurring tumor of the parotid gland, whereas palatal PA is the most prevalent of the minor gland tumors (Waldron, El-Mofty and Gnepp, 1988). Clinically, PA generally presents as a slowly enlarging, firm, well-circumscribed, painless nodule but occasional cases present after a short period of rapid growth or have been associated with pain (Foote and Frazell, 1953). While PA is rarely associated with cystic change or hemorrhagic necrosis (Foote and Frazell, 1953), spontaneous infarction appears to be very uncommon, in as much as a few large, detailed reviews of salivary gland tumors have not commented on this phenomenon in a combined total of 576 PA (Isacsson and Shear, 1983; Eveson and Dawson, 1985; Regezi et al., 1985; Waldron et al., 1988). To our knowledge, only two reports (Layfield et al., 1992; Allen et al., 1994) of spontaneous necrosis in PA have been documented in the English-language literature. Furthermore, there were a few cases of necrotic PA following fine-needle aspiration (FNA) (Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick, 1995; Pinto, Couto and Mandreker, 1996; Li et al., 2000; Bayramoglu et al., 2001; Pabuccuoglu et al., 2001).

A review of the surgical pathology database in our institution for the period 1979 to 2002 revealed only two cases of benign PA with central necrosis. Below we report these two cases with emphasis on the unique clinical phenomenon of the palatal necrotic tumor slipping into the patient's mouth (our first case) and on the dilemma of histologic diagnosis of the parotid necrotic tumor (our second case). Furthermore, a brief review of the pertinent literature on the subject is also presented.

Case 1

A 28-year-old Taiwanese male presented to the dental clinic of our institution with a rubber-like, painless, non-tender circumscribed lesion, measuring about 5 × 5-cm in diameter, and located in his right hard and soft palate extending to the midline (Figure 1). An initial mass was believed to have been stationary and present there for a period of about 1 year. The lesion, however, had grown rapidly recently to its size at patient presentation, causing some feelings of discomfort. The patient’s medical history was unremarkable, and no other abnormalities were found upon further examination. Radiographic findings were unremarkable, and routine laboratory investigations appeared normal. The clinical impression was that of a palatal PA. Subsequently, an incision biopsy was performed under local anesthesia, and the biopsied tissue then being sent for histopathological examination. Microscopic observation revealed a well-delineated lesion comprising epithelial and myoepithelial cells in a hyalinized connective-tissue stroma with flattened and cuboidal ductal epithelial cells present (Figure 2). This confirmed the clinical diagnosis of a PA.

One week subsequent to biopsy, the patient returned for suture removal and the palatal mucosa was found to have healed satisfactorily clinically. The diagnosis of PA was conveyed to the patient, and the complete treatment

Correspondence: Dr Li-Min Lin, Oral Pathology Department, School of Dentistry, Kaohsiung Medical University, 100 Shih-Chuan 1st Road, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. E-mail: k0285@ms22.hinet.net
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planning for the surgical removal of the tumor and subsequent rehabilitation procedures as well as the potential for complications were explained to him. As he required further consideration of his situation and options, the planned surgery was temporarily delayed. Two weeks later, the patient returned to our dental clinic with the complaint that a firm mass had been "slipped" into his oral cavity from the original incision biopsy wound on an occasion when he was laughing vigorously and loudly.

During that time, despite our thorough explanation about the possibility of tumor recurrence to the patient, he still refused to have any more treatment especially when he understood the tumor had been necrotic. Then, curiously, without the need for anesthesia, a firm mass, measuring about 2.5-cm in diameter, was subsequently easily removed through the original biopsy site. The mass was grayish in appearance, and subsequent histological examination revealed virtually complete tumor necrosis with no findings of PA being noted (Figure 3). The patient has since been followed-up regularly for 18 months without any evidence of any recurrence of the initial lesion or the development of any further associated signs or symptoms. The patient will continue to be followed-up at regular intervals for some time to come.

**Case 2**

A 39-year-old Taiwanese male presented to our institution with a rubber-like, painful circumscribed lesion, measuring about 1.3-cm in diameter, in his left preauricular area. The medical history was unremarkable. No other abnormalities were found on further examination. Routine laboratory investigations were normal. A computerized tomographic scan of the head and neck demonstrated a well-defined nodular mass within the left parotid gland (Figure 4). The scan also revealed that the mass had a peripheral rim of enhancement and a low attenuation center, suggestive of PA with central necrosis or malignant transformation (Figure 4). Subsequently, the entire tumor was removed under general anesthesia with lobectomy of the involved parotid gland. The postsurgical period was uneventful. Eighteen months after operation, the patient was healthy with no evidence of local recurrence.

Gross examination of the surgical specimen showed a yellow, necrotic center surrounded by a brown rim (Figure 5). Histologic examination revealed a well-limited lesion demonstrating central necrosis (Figures 6 and 7) with residual viable PA tissue comprising epithelial and myoepithelial cells in a connective tissue stroma (Figure 8). Immunohistochemical findings revealed that some of the epithelial tumor cells were positive for keratin and S-100 protein, while staining for desmin, myosin, glial fibrillary acidic protein, and carcinoembryonic antigen was negative. These microscopic pictures confirmed, therefore, the clinical diagnosis of parotid PA with central necrosis.

**Discussion**

From a review of the relevant English-language medical literature, with specific regard to the occurrence of

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**Figure 1** Case 1. A large well-circumscribed swelling in the right palate

**Figure 2** Case 1. Epithelial and myoepithelial cells in a hyalinized connective-tissue stroma (hematoxylin-eosin stained section, magnification × 40)
tumor necrosis of a PA, to the best of our knowledge, a total of 11 instances have been previously described (Layfield et al., 1992; Allen et al., 1994; Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick, 1995; Pinto et al., 1996; Li et al., 2000; Bayramoglu et al., 2001; Pabuccuoglu et al., 2001). These cases could be divided into two groups: spontaneous occurrence (six cases) and occurrence following FNA (five cases) (Table 1). The clinicopathological characteristics of these necrotic PAs (including our two cases) have been summarized in Table 1. Our case number two, undoubtedly, could be categorized into the spontaneous occurrence group because no surgical treatments before total excision of the tumor had been performed. Furthermore, our case number two represented only the second instance of spontaneous necrosis of PA arising in the parotid gland, the other cases having occurred in other glands. For our case number one, although no FNA has been performed, tumor necrosis occurred about 3 weeks following the incisional biopsy. Therefore, there are strong grounds for speculation that this case might be regarded as demonstrating tumor necrosis following incisional biopsy.

Central necrosis was generally a feature of all of the previously-reported cases, as well as our two cases, suggesting an ischemic or infarctive cause (Layfield et al., 1992; Allen et al., 1994; Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick, 1995; Pinto et al., 1996; Li et al., 2000; Bayramoglu et al., 2001). These cases could be divided into two groups: spontaneous occurrence (six cases) and occurrence following FNA (five cases) (Table 1). The clinicopathological characteristics of these necrotic PAs (including our two cases) have been summarized in Table 1. Our case number two, undoubtedly, could be categorized into the spontaneous occurrence group because no surgical treatments before total excision of the tumor had been performed. Furthermore, our case number two represented only the second instance of spontaneous necrosis of PA arising in the parotid gland, the other cases having occurred in other glands. For our case number one, although no FNA has been performed, tumor necrosis occurred about 3 weeks following the incisional biopsy. Therefore, there are strong grounds for speculation that this case might be regarded as demonstrating tumor necrosis following incisional biopsy.

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However, the etiology and pathogenesis of necrosis in these lesions remain unclear. For those previously-reported cases of necrotic PA associated with FNA, the possible etiological factors suggested have been the interruption of the microvascular supply, a compromised vascular arising from the extraction of large amounts of tissue, and traumatic venous thrombosis and vigorous aspiration of tissue (Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick, 1995; Pinto et al., 1996; Li et al., 2000; Bayramoglu et al., 2001; Pabuccuoglu et al., 2001). For the present two cases, however, no FNA had been implemented, but an incisional biopsy was performed in our case number one instead. Although it remains a subject of some conjecture, perhaps analogous to the above-mentioned effects associated with FNA, the incisional biopsy procedure performed in our particular case may have been responsible for localized ischemia in the tumor tissue, this resulting in tumor necrosis. However, this explanation does suffer from the drawback that incisional biopsy is almost a routine surgical practice in many dental clinics but, to the best of our knowledge, no similar phenomenon has been previously documented in the literature. On the other hand, in respect of the palatal tumor in this report, one might speculate that the large tumor mass could have exerted pressure on the greater or lesser palatine arteries as they leave the posterior palatine foramina, with consequent tumor necrosis (Allen et al., 1994). Furthermore, it is also possible that a large tumor mass as observed in our

Figure 6 Case 2. Low-power view of the histologic section demonstrating central necrosis with a rim of viable tumor tissue (hematoxylin-eosin stained section, magnification × 40)

Figure 7 Case 2. High-power view of the histologic section demonstrating the area of central necrosis (hematoxylin-eosin stained section, magnification × 100)
case number one could outgrow its blood supply resulting in infarction. However, this factor is less likely to be applicable to our case number two which was less than 1.5-cm in diameter. Besides the above-mentioned local factors, Layfield et al (1992) reported a diabetic and myocardial infraction patient who suffered from spontaneous necrosis of a PA, suggesting that the systemic condition of that patient may have predisposed to ischemic necrosis of the tumor. No such systemic conditions could be identified in our two patients. Therefore, the precise etiology of the necrosis in our two cases was unclear and remains speculative.

Of interest, for those previously-reported cases of tumor necrosis of a PA associated with FNA (Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick, 1995; Pinto et al, 1996; Li et al, 2000; Bayramoglu et al, 2001; Pabuccuoglu et al, 2001), the region of necrosis had only been observed to have occurred in focal areas corresponding to the sites of FNA. On the other hand, in those previously-reported spontaneous necrotic PA (Layfield et al, 1992; Allen et al, 1994), residual viable tumor tissues could be identified. Our case number one is somewhat unique in that the necrotic tumor mass was able to slip into the patient’s oral cavity through the biopsy wound. Such phenomenon has not yet been reported in the literature, to the best of our knowledge. It may be speculated that the whole palatal tumor had already been become somewhat necrotic and had experienced shrinkage subsequent to biopsying, prior to its emergence into the oral cavity. The sudden localized high pressure generated from the action of laughing vigorously may be one of the possible factors responsible for pushing the already necrotic and shrinking tumor mass out through the not-yet-completely healed biopsy wound and into the oral cavity. Furthermore, secondary involvement with the adjacent necrotic tissues may have enhanced the extrusion of the tumor. On the other hand, it should be noted that the appropriate therapy for a palatal PA of our case number one is not simple enucleation without anesthesia. It is understood that the patient refused further therapy, and such simple enucleation would be expected to leave residual tumor. Therefore, the patient will be followed-up at regular intervals for some time to come.

The present reported case number two represented an interesting clinicopathologic problem in differential diagnosis. The patient presented with a painful mass in the parotid gland, and radiologic and histologic evidence of necrosis could complicate the differential diagnosis. Although such necrosis certainly may be associated with malignancy, particularly in a PA (Boneu et al, 1998), such a finding should not be taken alone as a sign of malignant transformation (Layfield et al, 1992; Allen et al, 1994). The features that were highly suggestive of a benign process in our case number two included the well-circumscribed or encapsulated periphery, the lack of calcification in the tumor tissue and the absence of abnormal mitosis.

Table 1 Summary of the patients’ clinical data of the necrotic pleomorphic adenoma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Age (year)/sex</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Size of lesion</th>
<th>Time interval between surgery and FNA/incisional biopsy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gottschalk-Sabag and Glick</td>
<td>30/Male</td>
<td>Left submandible</td>
<td>2.5 cm</td>
<td>2 Week (FNA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinto et al (1996)</td>
<td>30/Male</td>
<td>Left parotid</td>
<td>3 cm</td>
<td>1.5 Month (FNA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li et al (2000)</td>
<td>37/Male</td>
<td>Right parotid</td>
<td>1.5 cm</td>
<td>2 Week (FNA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayramoglu et al (2001)</td>
<td>27/Female</td>
<td>Right parotid</td>
<td>1 cm</td>
<td>1 Month (FNA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabuccuoglu et al (2001)</td>
<td>26/Male</td>
<td>Right parotid</td>
<td>2.7 cm</td>
<td>10 Days (FNA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present case 1</td>
<td>28/Male</td>
<td>Right palate</td>
<td>5 cm</td>
<td>3 Week (incisional biopsy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layfield et al (1992)</td>
<td>48/Male</td>
<td>Left parotid</td>
<td>2.5 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (1994)</td>
<td>34/Male</td>
<td>Right hard palate</td>
<td>2 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (1994)</td>
<td>36/Male</td>
<td>Right hard palate</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (1994)</td>
<td>23/Male</td>
<td>Left submandible</td>
<td>4 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (1994)</td>
<td>83/Female</td>
<td>Posterior hard palate</td>
<td>3 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (1994)</td>
<td>25/Female</td>
<td>Soft palate</td>
<td>1 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
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<td>Present case 2</td>
<td>39/Male</td>
<td>Left parotid</td>
<td>1.3 cm</td>
<td>Spontaneous occurrence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


