CASE REPORTS

Left Atrial Appendage Aneurysm
Correlation of Noninvasive with Clinical and Surgical Findings:
Report of a Case

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SUMMARY
Congenital left atrial appendage aneurysm is rarely diagnosed on the basis of an abnormal cardiac silhouette. Patients with a left atrial appendage aneurysm often present with symptoms of systemic emboli or supraventricular arrhythmias. A patient with left atrial appendage aneurysm was diagnosed by correlation of two noninvasive techniques, echocardiography and radionuclide scintiscanning. Angiography was confirmatory and aneurysmectomy was successfully performed.

Congenital left atrial appendage aneurysms are rare and may involve the left atrial wall5-10 or the left atrial appendage.6-18 This discussion is limited to left atrial appendage aneurysms. These aneurysms mimic mediastinal or cardiac tumors. Systemic emboli and supraventricular arrhythmias endanger the patient with this condition.

Recently we had the opportunity to correlate noninvasive diagnostic techniques with clinical and surgical findings in a child with a left atrial appendage aneurysm. Echocardiography in conjunction with radionuclide scintiscanning established the diagnosis which was later confirmed by angiography and surgery.

Case Report

A chest X-ray obtained during evaluation for a moderately severe upper respiratory tract infection in this five-year-old girl revealed a prominent convexity on the upper left heart border. Following resolution of her infection, she was referred to the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The only abnormal physical finding in this normally developed child was a grade I/VI systolic ejection murmur audible only in the supine position at the third left intercostal space. Routine laboratory work and screening tests were within normal limits. The chest X-ray (fig. 1) showed a marked prominence at the upper left heart border. The electrocardiogram (fig. 2) recorded a heart rate of 140 beats/minute, a P-R interval of 0.16 seconds, broad notched "P" waves in lead I and biphasic, broad "P" wave in lead V1.

Noninvasive Studies

Echocardiography
The routine echocardiographic scan was normal. The aorta measured 1.9 cm in diameter and the left atrium was 2.0 cm. Left ventricular walls and cavity dimensions were within normal limits. All cardiac valves were normal and there was no evidence of solid tumor masses. The abnormal chest X-ray prompted us to reposition the transducer in the third intercostal space and direct the sound beam lateral to the aorta. The pulmonary artery with the pulmonic valve was seen and was normal in diameter (1.9 cm) (fig. 3). Further lateral rotation showed a large fluid filled cavity measuring 4.3 cm in diameter.

Radionuclide Cardiac Blood Pool Evaluation
Six millicuries of technetium sulphur colloid were injected intravenously and sequential scintigrams were taken in the anterior projection using a gamma camera system. Injections of Diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid (DTPA) were then accomplished and sequential images were obtained in the lateral and right anterior oblique projections. A large, slow emptying cavity of cardiovascular origin was seen anterior and left of the mediastinum (fig. 4). The radionuclide scintigrams established the roentgenographic abnormality was of cardiovascular origin. The echocar-
DIAGNOSIS OF CONGENITAL LA ANEURYSM

Figure 1

Top) The preoperative PA and lateral chest X-rays revealed prominent convexity at the upper left heart border. Bottom) The postoperative chest X-rays showed decreased prominence at the upper left heart border.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catheter position</th>
<th>Pressure (mm Hg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RA &quot;a&quot; wave</td>
<td>8, mean 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RV</td>
<td>37/0–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>32/13, mean 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>135/0–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ao</td>
<td>135/85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAW &quot;a&quot; wave</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;v&quot; wave</td>
<td>20, mean 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: RA = right atrium; PAW = pulmonary artery wedge; RV = right ventricle; PA = pulmonary artery; LV = left ventricle; Ao = aorta.

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Invasive Studies

Cardiac catheterization yielded no evidence of intracardiac shunts or valvar gradients. The mean pulmonary artery wedge pressure was 14 mm/Hg (table 1). Biplane pulmonary artery cine angiography with levophase study showed filling of a massive left atrial appendage aneurysm which compressed and displaced the left ventricle (fig. 5). Left ventricular diagram established that it was very large (4.3 cm in diameter anteroposteriorly) and was not a pulmonary artery aneurysm.

Consideration of both these studies established that the roentgenographic abnormality was a left atrial appendage aneurysm.

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Invasive Studies

Cardiac catheterization yielded no...
angiography confirmed compression and displacement of the ventricle. Mitral valve abnormalities were absent.

Surgical exposure through a median sternotomy found the pericardium intact. A large, thin-walled left atrial appendage aneurysm measuring 7 cm × 7 cm × 4 cm was found, compressing the left ventricle and forcing it posteriorly and medially (fig. 6). Under cardiopulmonary bypass the aneurysm was excised at a "neck" which joined the aneurysm to the body of the left atrium. Inspection revealed no evidence of thrombus formation.

Pathological examination revealed a 0.4 mm thick aneurysm wall joining to a left atrial wall which was 2 mm thick. Microscopic examination of the aneurysm showed areas of normally appearing atrial muscle interspaced with areas of fibrous tissue with complete absence of myocardial fibers.

The postoperative course was uneventful. The systolic murmur persisted. The chest X-ray (fig. 1)

Figure 3

Echocardiogram scan beginning in the area of the left atrial appendage aneurysm (LAAA) and sweeping medially through the pulmonary artery (PA) and into the area of the aorta (AO). PV = pulmonic valve.

Figure 4

Scintigrams from the radionuclide cardiac blood pool study taken at 6, 8, 10, and 14 seconds following injection revealed an abnormal accumulation of tracer at the left anterior border of the heart (arrows).
showed decreased prominence at the upper left heart border. The postoperative electrocardiogram (fig. 2) recorded a heart rate of 125 beats/minute, a P-R interval of 0.13 seconds, and no "P" wave notching. There was an increase in the lateral ventricular voltage. The postoperative routine echocardiogram remained within normal limits. The echocardiographic technique used preoperatively was employed and there was no cavity demonstrated lateral to the pulmonary artery.

Discussion

An abnormal roentgenographic cardiac silhouette should always concern the clinician. Dilatation of the left atrium causes an abnormal cardiac silhouette. Left atrial enlargement commonly occurs as a sequela to mitral valve disease or left ventricular myocardial disease; rarely, the enlargement is a congenital left atrial aneurysm. These aneurysms may involve either the left atrial wall or the left atrial appendage.8-16

Review of the 12 reported patients,8-16 including our patient, with left atrial appendage aneurysm revealed a propensity for embolic events and supraventricular arrhythmias (table 2). These potentially lethal complications call for prompt diagnosis and treatment. Atrial thrombi occur in patients with atrial arrhythmias. Even in the absence of arrhythmias emboli have occurred in patients with left atrial appendage aneurysms. Stasis of blood within the aneurysm probably predispose to thrombus formation.

The systolic murmurs which were audible in most patients with left atrial appendage aneurysms were probably secondary to causes other than the aneurysm. Cine angiographic analysis shows slow flow

Figure 5
Levophase AP and lateral pulmonary artery cine angiography showing filling of a massive left atrial appendage aneurysm (LAAA). Note the compression (arrow) of the left ventricle (LV).

Figure 6
Photographs showing the left atrial appendage aneurysm (LAAA). (A) in situ; (B) compressed to reveal indentation and posterior displacement of the left ventricle; (C) pulled anteriorly; and (D) excised at the "neck." LAD = left anterior descending coronary artery, PA = pulmonary artery, RV = right ventricle.
Table 2

Clinical, Angiographic, and Surgical Findings in Patients with Left Atrial Appendage Aneurysm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author &amp; date</th>
<th>Age/ Sex</th>
<th>SVA</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Physical findings</th>
<th>ECG</th>
<th>Chest X-ray</th>
<th>Clinical diagnosis</th>
<th>Angio</th>
<th>Preop diagnosis</th>
<th>Surgical finding</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palacio et al.</td>
<td>32 F</td>
<td>AF</td>
<td>Cerebral emboli &amp; AF</td>
<td>SM in PA area &amp; apex</td>
<td>AF</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>None stated</td>
<td>LAH or LV aneurysm</td>
<td>LAAA; clot present</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td>Reversion to sinus rhythm w/ quinidine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parmley</td>
<td>9 M</td>
<td>SVT PAT</td>
<td>Near syncope; emboli p expl. op.</td>
<td>3/6 SM at apex, ASD</td>
<td>IVCD</td>
<td>Globular, cardiomegaly</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>ASD &amp; enlarged LA</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Excision &amp; repair ASD</td>
<td>Good result NSR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>27 F</td>
<td>SVT</td>
<td>a. routine X-ray &amp; cerebral embolus 15 yr. earlier</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Cardiac tumor</td>
<td>Not done</td>
<td>Cardiac tumor</td>
<td>a. LAAA 7x5 x0 cm.</td>
<td>a. None</td>
<td>a. SVT &amp; cerebral emboli 2 yr. later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. cerebral embolus</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>b. Fibrosis of appendage; clots present</td>
<td>b. Excision</td>
<td>b. No additional emboli</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 F</td>
<td>Chest pain &amp; palp.</td>
<td>2/6 SM in PA &amp; 1/4 DM at LSB</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Mitral valve disease</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td>Unventful recovery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godwin, et al.</td>
<td>26 F</td>
<td>SVT</td>
<td>Tachycardia &amp; assoc chest pain Palp.</td>
<td>1/6 SM at apex</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Typical Lat. decubitus view surg. extra cardiac mass</td>
<td>None stated</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td>No palpitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloman, et al.</td>
<td>23 M</td>
<td>Routine X-ray</td>
<td>SM at base</td>
<td>PVC’s &amp; “T” wave abnormality</td>
<td>PAA or LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>No surgery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall</td>
<td>9 M</td>
<td>Cerebral emboli</td>
<td>No cardiac abnormalities</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>None stated</td>
<td>Lesion of LV</td>
<td>Lesion of LV</td>
<td>LAAA; no clots</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saloukides, et al.</td>
<td>34 F</td>
<td>SVT PAT</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Cardiac tumor, Aneur of LAA, PA, LV, or AO</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>No surgery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanderud, et al.</td>
<td>43 F</td>
<td>AF, DOF ankle edema</td>
<td>2/6 SM LSB</td>
<td>AF</td>
<td>Cardiomegaly</td>
<td>Mass opacified during left heart filling</td>
<td>None stated</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td>5 wks, post-op reverted to NRS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Diagnosis of Congenital LA Aneurysm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient</th>
<th>Cerebral Emboli</th>
<th>No Cardiac Abnormality</th>
<th>Normal Cardio-Megaly &amp; Mass at LHB</th>
<th>Tumor or Aneurysm</th>
<th>Coronary Arteriogram Normal</th>
<th>LV Tumor or Aneurysm</th>
<th>LAAA 10X 3 cm. Diameter</th>
<th>Excision</th>
<th>No Additional Emboli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krueger et al.</td>
<td>Routine X-ray</td>
<td>1/6 SM LSB</td>
<td>HR = 140 PR = 0.16 LAH</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>LAAA</td>
<td>Excision</td>
<td>No symptoms. Echocardiogram reverted to normal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: AF = atrial fibrillation; NSR = normal sinus rhythm; ASD = atrial septal defect; PA = pulmonary artery; DOH = dyspnea on exertion; PAA = pulmonary artery aneurysm; DM = diastolic murmur; Palp. = palpitation; IVC = interventricular conduction defect; PAT = paroxysmal atrial tachycardia; LAAA = left atrial appendage aneurysm; Peri = pericardial; LAH = left atrial hypertrophy; SM = systolic murmur; LHB = left heart border; SVA = supraventricular arrhythmia; LSB = left sternal border; SVT = supraventricular tachycardia; LV = left ventricle.

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Congenital left atrial appendage aneurysm is a rare cause of an abnormal roentgenographic cardiac silhouette. Patients with this entity may suffer from paroxysmal atrial tachycardia and pulmonary embolism, which may lead to stroke. The diagnosis is usually made by echocardiography, which shows the aneurysm as aneurysmal dilatation of the left atrial appendage. Surgical excision is the treatment of choice, as it eliminates the risk of embolization and thrombosis.

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The diagnosis of congenital LA aneurysm is established by echocardiography. The aneurysm is typically located in the left atrial appendage and is often associated with an atrial septal defect. Surgical excision is the treatment of choice, as it eliminates the risk of embolization and thrombosis. The echocardiogram is repeated after surgery to confirm resolution of the aneurysm.
systemic emboli and supraventricular arrhythmias. Correlation of the echocardiographic and radio-
nuclide findings can establish the diagnosis of left atrial appendage aneurysm. We present a patient with
left atrial appendage aneurysm which was diagnosed by noninvasive techniques, with confirmation by
angiography and at surgery. The aneurysm was successfully excised.

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