Reviewer's report

Title: Superior vena cava syndrome caused by a swollen absorbable haemostat after repair of ischaemic mitral regurgitation

Version: 1 Date: 11 September 2013

Reviewer: Jorge Almeida

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The case here submitted by Koki refers to SVC syndrome occurring early after CABG in an 81-year-old woman who also had mitral valve repair for ischemic regurgitation. Emergent surgery was decided. Intraoperatively an haematoma was found, compressing the SVC posterior wall at the entrance to the right atrium. Inside the haematoma there were two fragments of Surgicel used in the first operation to control bleeding.

Comments

Surgicel has been implicated in the formation of post-operative granulomas that can mimick abscess or tumoral masses. The diagnosis is often made months or years after the surgical procedure.

In normal circumstances, Surgicel absorption starts within 24 hours and is completed in 4-8 weeks. In some patients the haemostatic material can remain. This is usually related to mal-absorption due to an excessive use of Surgicel and it can lead to a foreign body inflammatory reaction.

The case here presented is an early occurrence. So, it is of no surprise that Surgicel material could still be found 48 hours after the intervention. Continuous bleeding with haematoma formation could be the main cause for SVC compression, being Surgicel just a bystander. In support of this possibility come other cases of superior vena cava syndrome caused by localized haematoma, occurring in early postoperative of cardiac surgery (1-3).

We should admit that the haematoma compressive effect was enhanced by the swollen Surgicel, a condition quite different from compression secondary to Surgicel granuloma formation (a late event). The distinction between these two possible side effects of Surgicel application does not result clear in the paper and in my opinion it has to be done.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:
No interests to declare