ABSTRACT

An epicardial mesothelial cyst, which can be defined as a mesothelial cyst attached to the epicardium surrounding the heart and the great vessels inside the pericardial sac, is a rare condition. We herein report a case of epicardial cyst, which was attached to the ascending aorta. The patient was a 76-year-old male who underwent coronary artery bypass surgery, and the cyst was found incidentally. It was approximately 5 cm in diameter, and histological examination confirmed mesothelial cell origin. The ascending aorta has not previously been reported as the origin of an epicardial mesothelial cyst. This case gives new insight into the embryology of these cysts.

BACKGROUND

An epicardial mesothelial cyst, which can be defined as a mesothelial cyst attached to the epicardium surrounding the heart and the great vessels inside the pericardial sac [Omeroglu 2004], is a rare condition. We herein report a case of epicardial cyst, which was attached to the ascending aorta. To our knowledge, only nine cases with clear documentation of mesothelial cell origin have been reported to date [Beirne 1954; Debus 2001; Edwards 1972; Hatemi 2012; Komeda 1985; Omeroglu 2004; Ozasa 1991; Scrofani 2002] and the attachment to the ascending aorta has never been reported before.

CASE REPORT

A 76-year-old male with Canadian Class 3 angina was referred to undergo coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) for double vessel disease. He also was noted to have a cyst inside the pericardium, which was incidentally found by a preoperative computed tomography scan, and was thought to be a pericardial cyst by the radiologists. He had undergone replacement of the infra-renal aorta for an abdominal aortic aneurysm three years earlier. He was hypertensive, and had chronic kidney disease. A coronary angiogram showed 75% stenosis at the proximal left descending artery, and 100% occlusion of the right coronary artery. CABG was scheduled as an elective surgery, and we planned to excise the suspected pericardial cyst at the same time.

At surgery, a median sternotomy was made. The pericardial sac was carefully opened. Unexpectedly, the cyst was not attached to the pericardium, but to the visceral epicardium. The cyst was located over the right ventricle, the right atrium, and the aortic root (Figure 1). It was thin-walled, and 5.5 × 4.0 cm. The coronary artery bypasses were performed first with a standard on-pump technique. The cyst was then resected under cardiac arrest after all of the anastomoses for the coronary artery bypass had been performed. It became apparent that the cyst was attached to the epicardium of the
An Epicardial Mesothelial Cyst Attached to the Ascending Aorta—Suenaga et al

On histological examination, the cyst lumen was found to be lined by a monolayer of flattened mesothelial cells (Figure 2).

**DISCUSSION**

An epicardial mesothelial cyst, which can be defined as a mesothelial cyst attached to the epicardium surrounding the heart and great vessels inside the pericardial sac, is an extremely rare condition [Omeroglu 2004]. To our knowledge, only nine cases with a clear pathological documentation of mesothelial cell origin have been reported to date [Beirne 1954; Komeda 1985; Scrofani 2002].

There are three major theories about the origin of pericardial mesothelial cysts. Lambert considered that extrapericardial cysts develop as a result of a failure of coalescence of the mesodermal spaces [Lambert 1940]. Lillie et al, however, suggested that these malformations occur at a later date when the coalescence is complete [Lillie 1950]; at this stage, the pericardial cavity possesses two ventral recesses which end in the septum transversum. Lillie's theory explains the high percentage (50-77%) of pericardial cysts located at the right cardiophrenic angle. In addition, some believe that cysts are an acquired disease [Omeroglu 2004].

The positions of the mesothelial cysts are important when discussing these theories. We found that the cysts were present in the upper anterior part of the pericardial sac in front of the aortic root in four of ten cases, including our present case [Beirne 1954; Komeda 1985; Scrofani 2002] (Table). Interestingly, although they existed at the same place inside the pericardial sac of the heart, they attached to different parts of the heart; to the right atrium and right ventricle [Komeda 1985], to the right atrium [Scrofani 2002], to the pulmonary trunk [Beirne 1954], and to the ascending aorta in our case.

It would be natural to speculate that an uncoalesced cyst existed first, which subsequently became attached to the adjacent structure. Lambert's theory seems to be acceptable for the etiology of the epicardial cysts. Since two of ten cases were found in children [Debus 2001; Komeda 1985], it may be natural to speculate that this condition would be congenital rather than acquired.

In conclusions, we observed a patient with an epicardial cyst attached to the ascending aorta. This area has not previously been reported as the origin of an epicardial mesothelial cyst, and gives new insight into the origin of these cysts.

**REFERENCES**


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**Case Reports of Patients with Epicardial Cysts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report/Year in the pericardial sac</th>
<th>Spatial position of the cyst</th>
<th>Location of attachment of the cyst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beirne/1954</td>
<td>Upper anterior</td>
<td>Pulmonary artery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komeda/1985</td>
<td>Upper anterior</td>
<td>RA and RV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrofani/2002</td>
<td>Upper anterior</td>
<td>RA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Case</td>
<td>Upper anterior</td>
<td>Ascending aorta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards/1972</td>
<td>Posterior</td>
<td>Posterior LV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debus/2001</td>
<td>Posterior</td>
<td>Posterior LV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatemi-2/2012</td>
<td>Posterior</td>
<td>Posterior LV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozasa/1991</td>
<td>Middle anterior</td>
<td>Anterior ventricles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omeroglu/2004</td>
<td>Middle anterior</td>
<td>Anterior ventricles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatemi-1/2012</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Whole surface</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RA indicates right atrium; RV, right ventricle; LV, left ventricle.