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Can trauma lead or mislead to the diagnosis of soft tissue sarcomas?

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Background

Clinical symptoms in soft tissue sarcomas (STS) are quite easy to investigate but often misleading. The main reason of misdiagnosis is the high frequency of benign or not-tumoural diagnosis comparing to malignant lesions. To date still many patients are initially treated for "hematomas" or "cysts" and then referred to a Sarcoma Unit worsening the prognosis. Many patients remind a trauma and consider it as a possible cause of sarcoma developing. The aim of the study is to determine whether a trauma can represent an alert for the diagnosis of a STS.

Methods

Fifty-one patients (26 males, 61 years old average, range 24-84 years) with a diagnosis of STS have been investigated according to the presence or not of a direct/indirect trauma in the same anatomical site of the STS referring to the previous medical history. Furthermore patients have been asked for the presence or not of a subcutaneous hematoma.

Results

Eighteen patients remembered a trauma. Nine were direct trauma and 9 indirect (muscle elongation, repetitive microtrauma, physical effort). Hematoma was present only in 4 cases: in 2 cases referred by the patient but not evaluated by a physician after a trauma (1 direct and 1 indirect), in 2 cases without a previous trauma (2 superficial STS with superficial veins involvement). No statistically significant association between trauma and hematoma was demonstrated ($p > 0,05$, Fisher exact test)

Conclusion

Despite clinical symptoms of STS are not specific, only an objectivable subcutaneous hematoma is to be considered an obvious sign of a relevant trauma. Hematoma should not be considered a possible diagnosis if there is no trauma and no "blood-thinning" therapy. On the other side a trauma can often represent an alert to make the patient notice the presence of a lump. The effect of a direct trauma in the developing of a STS is not demonstrated. Further studies can help in favouring the early diagnosis of STS and the correct referral to a Sarcoma Unit.

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