Regional enteritis leading to carcinoma of the small bowel

A. P. WYATT

From the Memorial Hospital, Woolwich, London

SUMMARY A case of carcinoma of the small bowel intimately associated with long-standing regional enteritis (Crohn’s disease) is described. Sixteen similar cases reported in the literature are briefly reviewed. This neoplasm presents at a younger age than other small bowel carcinomas and there seems little doubt that it is causally related to the inflammatory bowel lesion.

The aetiological factors in cancer of the bowel are not yet clear. In the colon there is, however, a known association with ulcerative colitis. This case report, with others in the literature, indicates that long-standing ulcerative and inflammatory disease in the small bowel is also in a proportion of cases followed by neoplastic change.

CASE REPORT

S.J.H., 33 years of age, a French polisher, was admitted in February 1968 for investigation of severe diarrhoea. His first attack of diarrhoea, which lasted for three months, had occurred seven years previously. For nine months after admission he had had eight to 10 bowel motions a day and had latterly become incontinent. Although the stools were watery he denied seeing any blood or mucus. He complained of vague abdominal pain and borborygmi and was anorexic. His weight had fallen by 40 lb in the previous few months.

Examination revealed an extremely wasted man with poor dental hygiene. No abnormal physical signs could be elicited from chest or abdomen. On rectal examination there was some anal spasm and watery stool. Sigmoidoscopy showed hyperaemic mucosa but no tendency to bleed and no ulceration.

He was anaemic (haemoglobin 10·3 g/100 ml, electrolytes within normal limits); no intestinal pathogens were isolated; serum proteins, total 5·4 g/100 ml (albumin 1·6 g/100 ml, globulin 3·8 g/100 ml). Alkaline phosphatase 50 KA units 100 ml; total serum bilirubin 0·3 mg 100 ml; SGOT 125 units, and SGPT 180 units. A barium meal showed a normal oesophagus, stomach, and duodenum, but the follow-through films showed abnormal small bowel with considerable dilatation and coarse mucosal folds. This appeared to begin in the lower jejunal region and extended down to the terminal ileum. The large bowel was also rather dilated and showed fluid levels in the erect position. A xylose excretion test was done: 9·2% of a 25 g dose had been excreted in five hours, a marked impairment. A duodenal biopsy was taken by Crosby capsule and showed thickening and flattening of the villi.

Treatment for a supposed malabsorption syndrome was instituted but his condition deteriorated further.

A barium enema was then done which showed an irregular channel from the right of the rectum communicating with the small bowel and the most probable diagnosis now seemed to be Crohn’s disease of the ileum with an iliorectal fistula. By this time he was even weaker; he became occasionally confused and developed bronchopneumonia. Intravenous feeding with aminosol and intralipid, plasma and blood transfusions together with antibiotics resulted in some degree of improvement for three or four days but then his condition began to deteriorate again and immediate correction of the fistula seemed to offer the only hope of survival.

The abdomen was explored through a right paramedian incision. A grossly dilated loop of lower ileum was found firmly adherent to the pelvis. Below this was a stricture and then the final four or five inches of terminal ileum which were grossly thickened. On dividing the adhesions an ileal fistula and two iliorectal fistulae were apparent in the region of the stricture. The mesenteric glands were enlarged. The liver was pale and fatty. The lower two feet of ileum and the caecum, appendix, and ascending colon were resected and an end-to-end anastomosis was made. The patient recovered consciousness after the anaesthetic but despite intensive treatment he died the following day. At necropsy the cause of death was said to be bronchopneumonia.

PATHOLOGY

Study of the opened operation specimen showed the terminal ileum to be thickened and fibrotic with numerous pits and clefts in a rather smooth fixed mucosa; above this was a very narrow strictured region and above this again the greatly distended obstructed ileum showing gross cobblestone changes, ulceration, and pseudopolyps. Multiple small polyps
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arising on the crests of the rugae extended for some distance above the more obviously diseased bowel. Microscopy of the stenosed area showed ulceration of the mucosa with inflammatory cells in the submucosa and a generalized lymphadenoid change with clefting. In some areas, where the mucosa was intact, there was malignant change with extension of an acinar adenocarcinoma through the muscle to the subserosal fat. The related lymph nodes showed inflammatory changes with no evidence of growth. It was concluded that the specimen showed Crohn’s disease of the ileum with carcinomatous change.

OTHER REPORTED CASES

Sixteen other cases of adenocarcinoma of the small bowel associated with Crohn’s disease have been traced in the literature and are summarized in Table I. In addition two cases of reticulum cell sarcoma with Crohn’s disease have been reported, one by Hughes (1955) and one by Wyburn-Mason (1968), but there are no details of these cases available and they will not be discussed further.

Certain features are apparent in Table I. In every recorded case, except two, there is a history of bowel symptoms for several years before neoplastic change was discovered; in several of these patients radiological or surgical evidence of regional enteritis had been obtained many years before. Excluding the two patients with a three-month history or less, mean duration of symptoms is 15-7 years. The age at the time of diagnosis of malignancy is also remarkably young when compared with other series of small bowel carcinoma. The mean age in this series is 42-7 years. Brooks, Waterhouse, and Powell (1968), reviewing a series of 55 small bowel carcinomas, none of which was associated with Crohn’s disease, found a mean age of 60-8 years. In Table II the ages of an expanded series of 119 cases of carcinoma of ileum and jejunum from the Birmingham Cancer Registry (Brooks, 1968) are compared in 10-year groups with

TABLE I

CASES OF CARCINOMA OF SMALL BOWEL ASSOCIATED WITH CROHN’S DISEASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No.</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Age at Diagnosis of Carcinoma (yr)</th>
<th>Duration of Bowel Symptoms</th>
<th>Site of Neoplasm</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ginsberg et al (1956)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19 yr</td>
<td>Jejunum</td>
<td>Hepatic metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kornfield et al (1957)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8 yr</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Crohn and Yarnis (1958)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B raack et al (1958)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9 yr</td>
<td>Ileum</td>
<td>Death from metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Buchanan et al (1959)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28 yr</td>
<td>Jejunum</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Weingarten et al (1959)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21 yr</td>
<td>Diseased bypassed jejunal loop</td>
<td>Death with peritoneal metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Weingarten and Weiss (1960)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5 yr</td>
<td>Small bowel</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Zisk et al (1960)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1 wk</td>
<td>Ileum</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Zisk et al (1960)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23 yr</td>
<td>In defunctioned diseased loop of ileum</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Steele and McNeely (1960)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14 yr</td>
<td>In defunctioned diseased loop of ileum</td>
<td>Death with metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Almond et al (1960)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23 yr</td>
<td>Terminal ileum</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hoffert et al (1963)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3 mth</td>
<td>Terminal ileum</td>
<td>Malignancy not obvious at resection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Berman et al (1964)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25 yr</td>
<td>Terminal ileum</td>
<td>Malignancy not obvious at resection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shell et al (1968)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5 yr</td>
<td>Terminal ileum</td>
<td>Peritoneal metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cantwell et al (1968)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31 yr</td>
<td>Ileum</td>
<td>Death with peritoneal metastases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Morowitz et al (1968)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22 yr</td>
<td>Ileum</td>
<td>Death with metastatic carcinoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Present case</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7 yr</td>
<td>Terminal ileum</td>
<td>Malignancy not obvious at resection. Death from inanition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE II

NUMBER OF CASES OF CARCINOMA OF SMALL BOWEL ALONE COMPARED WITH CARCINOMA ASSOCIATED WITH CROHN’S DISEASE OF SMALL BOWEL IN 10-YEAR AGE GROUPINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Total No. of Cases</th>
<th>Age at Diagnosis of Neoplasm (yr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks (1968) (Birmingham Cancer Registry 1950-1966)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curwen (1968) (St Bartholomew’s Hospital 1948-1952)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated with Crohn’s disease (see Table I)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
another small series, and with this group in which carcinoma is associated with Crohn's disease. The difference in age distribution is apparent. The prognosis in recorded cases has been poor; the cases have been reported early because they were thought to be of interest but even so at least seven patients of the series of 16 were dead, three directly of their malignancy.

In none of these cases was the diagnosis of carcinoma made preoperatively and in this case, as in cases 1, 5, 12, and 13, it was not obvious on macroscopic examination of the specimen but only on microscopy. Cases 6, 9, and 10 show that bypassing a diseased loop may leave a potentially dangerous situation in which malignancy may develop many years later.

**DISCUSSION**

Although it is accepted that there is an increased incidence of carcinoma of the colon in ulcerative colitis it is generally believed that no such association occurs in Crohn's disease. However, Perrett, Truelove, and Massarella (1968) have reported three cases of carcinoma of the colon associated with Crohn's disease of that organ and reviewed other cases in the literature. Their cases differed from these in that the granulomatous lesion was an incidental finding on operating to remove the carcinoma, quite the reverse of the present series, and none of their patients had a prolonged history of bowel disease before diagnosis of the carcinoma.

The sequence of events in this series is similar to that seen in ulcerative colitis where prolonged disease of the bowel may be followed many years later by carcinoma (De Dombal, Watts, Watkinson, and Goligher, 1966). Hinton (1966) quotes the clinical impression that young age at onset of colitis increases the risk, an impression also gained in this series where 12 of the 17 first had symptoms in the second or third decade of life.

From the paucity of reported cases it would appear that carcinomatous change in Crohn's disease of the small bowel is quite rare. In most series it does not feature at all. In a recently followed-up series of 302 cases of Crohn's disease (Murray, 1968), from King's College Hospital, London, there were six associated carcinomas, one each of oesophagus, stomach, rectosigmoid, rectum, kidney, and breast, but none of the small bowel. As already mentioned, the malignant lesion may not be macroscopically obvious so that a careful search of specimens with the possibility of malignancy in mind may result in more frequent diagnosis in the future.

The clinician, recognizing the possibility of malignant change, will be more inclined to offer ablative surgery in longstanding cases and avoid bypass procedures if at all possible.

I should like to thank Dr I. Williams for the pathology report.

**REFERENCES**


— (1968). Personal communication.


ADDENDUM
Since writing this report a further case has been published (Tyers, Steiger, and Dudrick, 1969) of carcinoma developing in a defunctioned loop of jejunum in a man of 32 who had had symptoms of regional enteritis for 12 years.

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