Lingual osteoma: report of three cases

Veerapong Sastarasadhit*
Pakpoom Supiyaphun* Pichet Sampatanukul**

Lingual osteoma is a rare benign lesion of the tongue. Its occurrence is around the foramen cecum and predominates in female patients in the third decade. Lingual thyroid tissue is proposed to be the cause of this tumor, however other hypotheses are discussed. The authors report three cases of lingual osteomas found during 5 years period (Jan 1, 1982-Dec 31, 1986) at Chulalongkorn Hospital. The tumors were diagnosed and treated by excisional biopsies.

Reprint request: Sastarasadhit V, Department of Otolaryngology, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand.
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* Department of Otolaryngology, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University.
** Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University.
วิวัฒน์ ศาสตราภิญ, ภาคภูมิ สุปิยพันธุ์, พิเชฐ สัมภาษณ์คุณ. เนื้อเยื่อคลื่นโลหะเจริญ : รายงานผู้ป่วย 3 ราย. จุฬาลงกรณ์เวชสาร 2534 เมษายน; 35(4) : 213-217

Osteoma ของลิ้นเป็นเนื้อเยื่อที่มีการเจริญฟักได้ในผู้สูงอายุระหว่าง 20-30 ปี พบที่ส่วนหน้าของกระดูกนิ่ว ซึ่งมีความเสี่ยงที่จะเกิดขึ้นที่บริเวณรู foramen cecum ของโคนจมูก เมื่อมีการเจริญฟักในผู้สูงอายุช่วง 20-30 ปี พาลิ่งค์เลือดซึ่งเกิดจาก การผ่านผ่านรูของ thyroid ผ่านหลอดรับรูโคนจมูก แต่ยังไม่ได้รับการวินิจฉัยอย่าง สมเหตุสมผล น่าจะเนื่องจาก osteoma ของลิ้นในผู้ป่วยหญิงอายุ 3 รายที่มีอาการรักษาที่โรงพยาบาลสุราจาระในช่วง 5 ปี (1 มกราคม 2525-31 ธันวาคม 2529) โดยการฝึกสำหรับเนื้อเยื่อของลิ้น
Osteogenous tumors of the head and neck are not as common as in the long bone. They are often found as osteomas in the paranasal sinuses, facial bone, skull and mandible\(^1\). The osteomas of the soft tissue in the oral cavity are extremely rare and they are found originating from either the tongue or the oral mucosa, however the tongue is the predominant site\(^2\).

On reviewing the English literatures, nearly 40 cases of the osteoma of the tongue are reported\(^3-5\). The authors found three pathologically proven cases of osteoma of the tongue at Chulalongkorn Hospital in the 5 years period and we think these will be of additional interest.

**Case reports**

**Case 1**

A 28 year-old Thai woman presented to the E.N.T. department with complaint of irritation in the throat for four years. During a four years period she went to see a general practitioner near her house. The symptom was off and on but never did cause severe troubles to her. She denied familial disorders, occupational or chronic diseases. On examination, a round, stony-hard mass of one-cm. in diameter was found on the dorsum of the tongue just to the left of the midline at the junction of anterior two-thirds and posterior one-third of the tongue (Fig 1). The provisional diagnosis of osteoma of the tongue was made and the patient was set up for excisional biopsy under local anesthesia without any pre-operative investigations. Microscopic examination demonstrated a well-circumscribed lesion covered with non-keratinizing stratified squamous epithelium. The lesion composed of a mass of viable compact bone with osteocytes and lacunae (Fig 2). The pathological diagnosis of osteoma of the tongue was finally made. There was no recurrence after 3 years follow-ups.

![Figure 1. A round stony-hard mass of one-cm. in diameter with smooth and glistening surface is at the base of tongue.](image1)

![Figure 2. (low power) A mass of viable compact bone covered with non-keratinizing stratified squamous epithelium (arrow heads), (the separation between the mass and epithelium was due to preparation)](image2)

**Case 2**

The patient, a 25-year-old woman presented to the E.N.T. out-patient department for evaluation of a tongue mass found on a routine physical examination by a private otolaryngologist one month earlier. She was suffering from allergic rhinitis for many years and was infrequently being treated by otolaryngologists in various clinics. One year prior to the examination she was also aware of a lump in her throat. She had negative history to either tuberculosis or any serious diseases. Physical examination revealed a 0.5 cm firm pedunculated mucosal-covered mass originating from the left of foramen cecum at the base of the tongue. The rest of the examinations were normal. The mass
On follow-up, the mass did not recur 2 years post-operatively.

Discussion

Lingu al osteoma is a benign lesion histologically and characteristically. Beside the osteoma, chondroma, osteochondroma, fibroma, cyst, salivary gland tumor, ectopic thyroid tissue and granular cell myoblastoma may be included in the differential diagnosis. About 70 cases of osteoma, osteochondroma and chondroma were reported in the world literature, but only 40 cases were osteomas.

Osteoma of the tongue usually presents in female (about 75% of cases) mostly in the third decade (average age = 28 years old) and there is no apparent race predilection. These data correlate with our cases that all of them are women and two of them present in the third decade. Approximately 40% of the patients have complained of either dysphagia or a sensation of fullness or foreign body-like sensation in the posterior third of the tongue. Chronic sore throat, nausea, and choking are noted as complaints. However, most patients have been asymptomatic and the lesion were found during routine ear nose and throat examinations. This statement is true in our two patients that the osteomas have been found accidentally during otolaryngologic examinations.

The majority of glossal osteoma are about 0.5-2 cm in diameter and are located at or closely related to the foramen cecum or circumvallate papillae of the tongue in pedunculated or sessile fashions. Some exceptions in those found in the buccal mucosa and multiple osteomas of the tongue have been reported. Some tumors are mixtures of osseous and chondroid tissues (osteochondroma) and multiple lesions of chondroma and osteochondroma have been reported. Only one case of a malignant osseous tumor of the tongue has been reported in the literature.

The pathogenesis of an extracapsular osteoma in the tongue is still debated. At least three theories have been proposed to explain their occurrence. The first one is that osteomas of the tongue result from metaplastic changes that occur in mesodermal cells in the tongue, often related to chronic local irritation from trauma, irradiation and infection. A second theory is that of the occurrence of ectopic bone formation and the term “osseous choristoma” is used to describe the lesion. Pathologically, choristoma are growths of mature normal cell that are found at sites in the body remote from their normal location. The last theory is the congenital cause which includes many explanations of the relationship between the location of osteoma and the foramen cecum. An ossified
branchial arch remnants especially the Meckel’s cartilage.
It has been hypothesized that the osteoma of the tongue
is the unformed, smaller “twin” that joins each other
in the oral cavity and that is the “epignathus” formation
theory\(^\text{(10)}\).

Of all these theories, not a single one gives us
a clear answer. However, the most likely explanation
is the ossified lingual thyroid tissue, because most of
the cases of lingual osteoma are females in the third
decade of life which can compared with the predominant
diseases that are found in the woman at the same age,
however, it cannot yet be proved\(^\text{(3)}\).

The tumors in our three cases also presented
near the foramen cecum. We think the number of
tumors are too small to study the exact pathogenesis.
Postmortem study has been designed to discover either
the bone or cartilage forming cells in the human tongue
but failed to demonstrate even in a single case\(^\text{(2)}\).

**Summary**

Osteoma are benign bony neoplasm commonly
found in the long bones and in the skull and facial
bones. Osseous growth within soft tissue structures
of the head and neck are rare. To date, nearly 40
cases of osteomas of the tongue were reported. In
addition, osteochondroma and chondroma, the other
two growths that relate to osteoma were also found.

The authors report on three patients with a
bony tumor at the base of the tongue, two of whom
were asymptomatic and the masses found on routine
otolaryngologic examination; the other one complained
of irritating sensation in the throat. All cases were
diagnosed and treated by excisional biopsies with no
recurrence on the follow ups.

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