Ectopia Cordis and Cardiac Anomalies
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Ectopia cordis is a rare disease that occurs in 5.5 to 7.9 per million live births. Only 267 cases had been reported as of 2001, most (95%) associated with other cardiac anomalies. We studied the cardiac malformations associated in 6 patients with ectopia cordis. Depending on where the defect was located, the cases of ectopia were classified into four groups: cervical, thoracic, thoraco-abdominal, and abdominal. All 6 patients died before the third day of life, 4 during delivery. Three of the patients were included in the thoracic group, whereas the other 3 belonged to the thoraco-abdominal group. All the patients had associated ventricular septal defects, 3 double-outlet right ventricle (50%) and the rest (50%) tetralogy of Fallot-pulmonary atresia. Two patients with double-outlet right ventricle presented mitral-valve pathology, a parachute valve and an atresic mitral valve. None of these cardiac anomalies have been reported to date.

Key words: Ectopia cordis. Congenital heart defects. Tetralogy of Fallot. Ventricular septal defect.

INTRODUCTION

Ectopia cordis is a rare disease that is defined by the abnormal position of the heart outside the thorax associated with defects in the parietal pericardium, diaphragm, sternum, and, in most cases, cardiac malformations. The designation ectopia cordis was first proposed by Abott in 1898, although cases of patients with similar defects had been described for decades with other designations. Byron classified ectopia cordis into four types: cervical, thoracic, thoracoabdominal, and abdominal. The abdominal group included patients with an anomaly of the abdominal midline (omphalocele) who met the defining characteristics of the disease. In 1958, Cantrell reported a syndrome with five defects: anomalies of the chest wall, abdomen, diaphragm, pericardium, and heart.

We report the results of an anatomic study of the type of congenital cardiac malformations present in a series of 6 patients with ectopia cordis. 3 of the thoracoabdominal type and 3 of the thoracic type.

CLINICAL CASES

Case 1

A newborn girl, gestational age 38 weeks, birth weight 2685 g. Maternal history of miscarriage. At birth she was cyanotic, had ears with a low implantation, omphalocele of 6x6 cm covered by a membrane, and an open sternum (incomplete thoracoabdominal...
the opening with artificial tissue, but the infant presented progressive general deterioration, polypnea, and tachycardia. Ventilation was begun due to atelectasis of both pulmonary lower lobes, but she died within 24 h. In the cardiac post mortem study, the heart was medial, the superior vena cava opened onto the coronary sinus, and there was a ventricular septal defect due to poor alignment of the infundibular septum (0.6 × 0.5 cm). In addition, a parachute mitral valve (Figure 1), right double-outflow ventricle, pulmonary stenosis, and coronary arteries opening on the anterior and left coronary sinuses were present.

Case 2

A newborn boy, gestational age 38 weeks, birth weight 2980 g. The mother had a history of metrorrhagia in the first trimester of pregnancy. At birth, the infant had generalized cyanosis that intensified with crying, and omphalocele with a split sternum (incomplete thoracoabdominal ectopia cordis). The physical examination revealed normal pulmonary auscultation and reinforcement of the second heart sound, without murmurs. Surgery was performed on the day of admission to resect the omphalocele sac and reinforce the anterior thoracoabdominal wall with synthetic tissue. The patient developed anuria and died 3 days after birth. In the cardiac post mortem study, the left superior vena cava drained into the coronary sinus, there was a perimembranous ventricular septal defect, pulmonary atresia (Figure 2), and coronary arteries opening on the posterior and left sinus.

Case 3

A newborn boy, gestational age 42 weeks, birth weight 2900 g. At birth he had Apgar score 7 and 9 (5 min), cyanosis of the skin and mucous membranes, polypnea with flail chest, omphalocele with an open sternum, and medial heart. In the chest radiograph the diaphragm was absent and the abdominal organs were in the chest (incomplete thoracoabdominal ectopia cordis). Surgery was performed but the patient died within 24 h. The cardiac post mortem study disclosed drainage of the superior and inferior cava veins into the right atrium, drainage of the pulmonary veins into the left atrium, mitral atresia (Figure 3), perimembranous ventricular outflow septal defect, and emergence of the pulmonary artery and aorta from the right ventricle. In addition, pulmonary valve stenosis and mild hypoplasia of the left ventricle were observed. The coronary arteries arose from the anterior and left coronary sinuses.

Case 4

A newborn girl, gestational age 40 weeks, with a birth weight of 2800 g. At birth she had central cyanosis
with respiratory distress. She died in spite of reanimation measures. The heart was covered by visceral pericardium and the sternum was open (complete thoracic ectopia cordis). In the cardiac post mortem study, the drainage of the cava veins and pulmonary veins in their respective atria was normal. There was a perimembranous subaortic ventricular septal defect and the aorta straddled the ventricular septum. The right outflow infundibulum, pulmonary valve, and pulmonary trunk (tetralogy of Fallot) were stenotic. A right arch existed. The coronary arteries had a normal origin.

**Case 5**

A newborn boy, gestational age 36 weeks, birth weight 2700 g. The infant had an open sternum and extrathoracic heart covered only by visceral pericardium (complete thoracic ectopia cordis). At birth he presented generalized cyanosis and polypnea, and he died within a few hours. In the cardiac post mortem study, the right atrium was dilated and received drainage from two cava veins and two right pulmonary veins. The foramen ovale was permeable and the left pulmonary veins drained into the left atrium. A perimembranous infundibular septal defect was present. The aorta and pulmonary artery emerged from the right ventricle, both with a subvalvular infundibulum. The left ventricle was of normal size.

**Case 6**

A male newborn, gestational age 38 weeks, birth weight 3000 g. He died a few minutes after birth. The sternum was open and the patient had an extrathoracic heart covered only by visceral pericardium (complete thoracic ectopia cordis). In the cardiac post mortem study, a bilateral superior vena cava was observed, from which the cava veins and pulmonary veins in their respective atria was normal. There was a perimembranous subaortic ventricular septal defect and the aorta straddled the ventricular septum. The right outflow infundibulum, pulmonary valve, and pulmonary trunk (tetralogy of Fallot) were stenotic. A right arch existed. The coronary arteries had a normal origin.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Patients with ectopia cordis present serious cardiac malformations, generally troncoconal anomalies. Two of our patients had malformations that have not been described previously. In spite of attempts at surgical treatment, few patients with these cardiac malformations survive and most of them die in the first week of life.

**REFERENCES**

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