Primary cardiac tumors are infrequent and usually benign. They can manifest as dyspnea, chest pain, palpitations, sudden death, peripheral embolism, cyanosis, or general symptoms. They are sometimes an incidental finding in an asymptomatic patient. We describe a 33-year-old man who was seen because of dyspnea and palpitations. Transthoracic echocardiography revealed, on the lateral wall of the left ventricle, an intramyocardial mass that was successfully resected surgically. The pathologic diagnosis was hamartoma of mature cardiac myocytes. We discuss the usefulness of imaging techniques for identifying cardiac masses.

Key words: Cardiomyopathy. Imaging. Diagnosis.
Ventriculography showed a filling defect in the lower part of the ventricle. Coronary angiography showed irrigation of the mass via the obtuse marginal branch and the right coronary artery. Thoracoabdominal computed tomography detected neither adenopathy nor other masses.

A benign heart tumor interfering with left ventricular filling was suspected and surgery scheduled. Following left ventriculotomy, the mass was partially resected and the posteromedial papillary muscle reimplanted.

Anatomopathological examination (Figure 3) showed an irregular distribution of histological elements, including disordered, hypertrophied muscle fibers containing myocytes with large nuclei, surrounded by fibrous and adipose tissue. The final diagnosis was a hamartoma composed of mature cardiomyocytes.

Following surgery, Holter-ECG detected a very weak ventricular extrasystole. Ergometry was negative (patient score 11 METS). The patient followed a cardiac rehabilitation program and has been asymptomatic and has suffered no post-operative problems for three years.

DISCUSSION

The low cost and innocuous nature of echocardiography make it the technique of choice in initial studies of heart masses. The technique can localize such masses, define their shape, size, mobility, and point of anchorage, and determine whether they are solid or cystic in nature.

Magnetic resonance supplies structural and hemodynamic information since it offers both static and dynamic sequences, and images can be acquired from an unlimited number of planes and projections. Tissue characterization via images potentiated in T1 and T2 complete this information. Slightly increased intensity in T1 is seen in tissues with fibrous or muscular contents, but never where there is adipose tissue. Hypointensity in T2 rules out that the mass contains liquid. These tissue characteristics, plus the absence of infiltration, first suggested the present mass might be a fibroma. However, the images obtained after gadolinium injection showed good vascularization. This suggested it not to be a fibroma since these tumors have low metabolic requirements; at this point it was be-
lieved the mass might be a hemangioma or a malign
ant tumor. Coronary angiography was performed to
define the vascular supply and to help indicate the sur-
tical technique to follow. Coronary angiography also
supplies data on the presence of obstructive arterial
disease, and on the vascular malformations seen in
rare cases of intramyocardial dissecting hematoma. It
can also be used to ratify a diagnosis of heman-
gioma.

A hamartoma is a benign overgrowth of the mature,
differentiated cells of the organ in which it is found.
However, these cells are disorganized. The mass re-

results from the anomalous development of embryonic
cells.

Focal hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (FHC) and
rhabdomyoma also involve hypertrophied myocytes,
but with different histological and pathogenic charac-
teristics. A family background and a preference for the
septal region tend to be associated with FHC, whereas
presentation during infancy and an association with
Bourneville’s disease are related to rhabdomyoma.
The definitive diagnosis is anatomicopathological.

The first descriptions of hamartomas composed of
mature heart cells appeared in 1998. The intracardiac
location of such tumors has been reported in small
groups of patients. An essential characteristic of
cardiac hamartomas is the presence of hypertrophied myocytes lying in a disordered fashion and mixed with
vascular, fibrous and fatty tissue in different propor-
tions. This varied histological presentation has led to a
certain nomenclatural confusion. Hamartomas can ap-
pear on their own, but on rare occasions can be multi-
ple. They preferentially develop on the ventricle wall
but have been reported on valve tissue.

One of the most common manifestations of these tu-
mors is ventricular tachycardia in children and young
people; a case of a 2-year-old was reported in this
journal. Treatment is surgical and good short-term
results are usually achieved. The present patient no-
ticed palpitations; ventricular extrasystoles were de-
tected but no tachycardia was recorded.

The presentation of hamartomas in young adults,
and their slow growth, suggests a possible congenital
genesis with hypertrophy and development of the mass
in the first years of life. In the present case, the recor-
ding of electrical anomalies 8 years before the current
events suggests this possibility. Other authors have
described congenital fibrous cardiac tumors (not asso-

ciated with complex hereditary problems) in infancy,
adolescence and early adulthood.

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