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Rare Types of Perforation of the Gastrointestinal Tract – Diagnosis, Tactics, Treatment

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RATIONALE Hollow organ perforation is an urgent problem in abdominal surgery. According to the literature, the incidence of perforation is from 0.37% to 2.3% of cases among various acute surgical pathologies of the abdominal organs.

The greatest attention in the literature is paid to the problem of perforated gastroduodenal ulcers. At the same time, a much smaller number of publications, both Russia and foreign, are devoted to other, more rare types of perforations. This situation is most likely explained by the low prevalence of other types of perforations, which, in turn, does not make them a less urgent problem in emergency surgery, which requires a modern approach to the treatment of this group of patients.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY Analysis of domestic and foreign literature on the diagnosis and treatment of rare types of benign intestinal perforations. MATERIAL AND METHODS A literature review was performed for the period from 1994 to 2020 in Russian and in English, available on Pubmed, Medline, Springer, Scopus, E-library, on topics such as perforated diverticula of the small intestine, perforation of Meckel's diverticulum, perforated ulcers of the small intestine, perforation of the intestine by a foreign body.

RESULTS With all the variety of surgical techniques for various types of perforation of the gastrointestinal tract, currently in the literature there are no specific criteria for choosing a particular method of intervention with regard to the cause, level, and duration of perforation.

CONCLUSION The lack of unified approaches in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with rare GIT perforations dictates the need for a more indepth study of this issue in order to apply and optimize the technique of videolaparoscopic approach, develop a treatment and diagnostic algorithm for patients with suspected perforations of the gastrointestinal tract using the video laparoscopic method.

Keywords: hollow organ perforation, bowel perforation, foreign body, diverticula, small bowel ulcers, Crohn's disease

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CT, computed tomography

GIT, gastrointestinal tract

Table

US examination, ultrasound examination

ETIOLOGY AND EPIDEMIOLOGY

Among rare causes of the non-tumour perforations of gastrointestinal tract (GIT) hollow organs, the literature most commonly describes such as the small intestine diverticular disease, swallowed foreign bodies, and small bowel ulcers of various origins (acute ulcers, ulcers in infectious diseases and chronic inflammatory conditions of the small intestine). Table 1 presents a brief meta-analysis of the occurrence of various cases of rare types of perforations in foreign and domestic literature in the period from 1994 to 2020.

Rare types of perforation of the gastrointestinal tract hollow organs for the period from 1994 to 2020

Duodenum diverticula	10 cases [4,8,9,10,42,65,66,67]
Jejunum diverticula	12 cases [1,2,3,6,7,12,47,55,68]
Meckel's diverticulum	23 cases [6,16,17,18,20,23,69,70,71]
Foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract	16 cases [23,24,26,28,29.31,45,56,72,73,74,75]
Small bowel ulcers	221 cases [32,34,38,39,64,76,77,78,79]
Crohn's disease	218 cases [36,40,41,80]
Total	500 cases

Gastrointestinal diverticula are most commonly found in the colon. Small intestine diverticulosis is much less common, occurring in only 0.06%-1.9% of cases [1, 2, 3]. According to Schnueriger B. et al., 2008, over the recent 40 years, about 80 clinical cases of small intestine diverticula have been described by Russian and foreign authors [2,4].

In the structure of small intestine diverticular disease, duodenal diverticula are most common (60-79%), followed by jejunal diverticula (18-25%), ileum diverticula (5-18%) [3, 5, 6]. About 3% of cases are caused by diverticulosis, which affects all parts of the small intestine [3]. Small bowel diverticulae are found in 0.3%-1.3% of autopsies, 0.5%–1.9% of radiological studies with contrast enhancement, as an intraoperative finding, and are more common in elderly patients [7].

Duodenal diverticula are the most common among small bowel diverticulae. [5,8]. According to the authors from the USA (J. Philip et al 2019), up to 5% of cases are detected during radiological studies, and up to 22% during autopsies, increasing with age – in most cases in people over 40 years of age. Only about 5% of duodenal diverticula cases manifest themselves with symptoms and complications. Perforation, although being the rarest complication, but it is the most serious one [9].

World literature describes a high mortality rate in this pathology, varying from 3 to 34% [9, 10]. Other American authors reported an 8% mortality rate in a review of 61 cases from 1989 to 2011. Kellie L. Mathis et al., reported only 3% in a series of studies of 34 patients treated in Surgery Departments at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine (Rochester, Minnesota, USA) from 1969 to 2001 [10, 11].

Jejunum diverticula are no less rare pathology of the upper GIT. In some cases, diverticulae are an accidental finding during radiological, endoscopic examinations, during surgical interventions or autopsies [3, 12]. Only 10% of cases have complications [3, 13], including the perforation, which is a serious complication and occurs with an incidence of 2%-6% [3]. According to a number of foreign authors, the mortality rate from jejunal diverticulitis ranges from 0 to 5%, increasing to 40% in case of a perforation [3, 15].

Somewhat apart from all small bowel diverticulae is Meckel's diverticulum, which is a congenital true diverticulum. Meckel's diverticulum is found in approximately 2% of the population, more often in men, which makes it the most prevalent congenital pathology of the gastrointestinal tract [16-19].

A publication by a group of authors from Portugal (2019) shows the detection rate of 0.14–4.5% at autopsies [18]. Complications occur in 4-6% of cases and can present a life-threatening condition that requires an urgent treatment. Most complications occur before the age of 3 years old [16, 20]. In Soltero M.J. study of 202 patients, the lifetime risk of developing complications in Meckel's diverticulum ranged from 2% to 4%, depending on the age of the patients [21]. In an epidemiological study of the Mayo Clinic (Cullen J.J. et al.), the rate of complications in Meckel's diverticula was 12% [22].

Perforated Meckel's diverticulum is a serious complication caused by diverticulitis, bedsore caused by enterolithus, ulceration of the produced ectopic gastric mucosa in the diverticulum tissue, and by a swallowed foreign body [17, 18, 23, 24, 25].

According to another study from the Mayo Clinic (Santos B. et al.), the postoperative lethality after surgical interventions for Meckel's diverticulum was 1.5%, and the incidence of late postoperative complications during 20 years of follow-up reached 7% [18].

Up to 0.37% of patients with acute surgical diseases of the abdominal cavity are patients with foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract [26]. A specific group includes patients with ingested foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract. Meanwhile, only 10%-20% of such patients require a special treatment. In the vast majority of cases, foreign bodies pass through the gastrointestinal tract and are evacuated via a natural route, without causing any painful phenomena.

Up to 80% of these patients are children; and among adults, these are mainly people of the senile age group, neurological patients with swallowing disorders, patients in psychiatric hospitals, and people who wear dentures. In about 1% of these cases, foreign bodies result in a perforation. Swallowing of foreign bodies often occurs during meals, during the game process in children, and it can also be associated with a bad habit of holding needles, pins, nails in one's mouth while working. According to most authors, long, thin, pointed objects such as fish bones, chicken bones, and toothpicks are particularly dangerous, and can cause a GIT perforation. [26, 27, 28, 29, 30]. Such foreign bodies most often injure the intestine in the places of its most pronounced natural bends: the ileocecal junction and the rectosigmoid part of the colon [31]. Delayed diagnosis of perforation by a foreign body can lead to severe consequences, up to a fatal outcome, which amounts to 18% [26].

Rare causes of perforations also include small bowel ulcers: idiopathic [32, 33], due to the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [34, 35], glucocorticosteroids [33, 35, 36], and chemotherapeutic agents [33, 34, 35]. The incidence of acute small bowel ulcer perforations, according to literature data, does not exceed 3-5% [37, 38]. At the same time, according to some authors, its occurrence has increased almost 8-fold over the recent 20 years [32], and the mortality rate has significantly increased and reaches as much as 90% [37, 38].

Also, the perforated small intestine ulcers can be caused by various inflammatory diseases. In the literature, there are data on ulcerative lesions of the small intestine as a complication of infectious diseases. Russian and foreign authors have described perforations of the small intestine in typhoid fever, cytomegalovirus infection [33], and HIV infection [33, 34, 39].

According to V. P. Zemlyanoy et al. (2018), in patients with decompensated forms of viral hepatitis combined with HIV infection and abdominal tuberculosis, the course of the disease is complicated by intestinal perforation in 29.8%-44.2% of cases [34].

To date, the problem of small bowel perforations as complications of various chronic inflammatory bowel diseases has been poorly studied [32, 33, 40, 41]. There are rare publications on small bowel perforation in Crohn's disease [36, 40, 41]. According to Y.S. Doh data from Korea, a bowel perforation occurred in 6.5% of patients with Crohn's disease, of whom the ileum was affected in 86.2% cases, jejunum in 6.4%, colon in 7.9%; and 5% of patients had perforations in several parts of the intestine. The mortality rate for perforation in

these patients was 4.6% [36]. Meanwhile, the prevalence of perforations in Crohn's disease in Western countries has been at the level of 1-2% [36, 41].

A review of the Russian and foreign literature for any studies on rare types of GIT tract hollow organ perforations has shown an extremely small amount of information on the treatment results, especially on that of long-term results. The problem requires study to determine the true incidence of pathologies and various causes of rare types of GIT hollow organ perforations.

CLINICAL PRESENTATION

Most conditions that are complicated by a hollow organ perforation may be asymptomatic for a long time. So, uncomplicated diverticulosis of various parts of the small intestine most often has no clear clinical pattern and is manifested only by dyspeptic disorders [10, 42, 43]. Only 29% of patients develop clinical manifestations [3, 44]

The leading symptoms of perforation in various parts of the small intestine include pain of varying intensity, loose stools, and fever, which often force the patient to seek doctor's advice. [10, 17, 18, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, 43]. Most often, patients are admitted at the hospital with suspicion of another acute abdominal pathology. The literature describes cases of intestinal perforation by a foreign body, perforated Meckel's diverticulum occurring under the mask of acute appendicitis, [17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 29], or acute pancreatitis [45].

MAKING DIAGNOSIS

Various imaging techniques allow the practicing doctor to suspect the presence of a hollow organ perforation in a patient, as well as evaluate the indications for surgical treatment.

Most often, a common radiography is not informative, since free gas in the abdominal cavity is visualized only in 10% of cases, and with retroperitoneal perforation it is not detected at all. [10, 11].

Computed tomography (CT) is the imaging technique having a high diagnostic value in the diagnosis of a hollow organ perforation. CT can reveal thickening of the organ wall, small loci of free gas in the abdominal cavity, free fluid, and signs of abscess formation [7, 10, 46, 47]. Its sensitivity is 97%, and its accuracy is 98%, which is much higher compared to radiography (47% and 52%, respectively) [48].

T. Ishiguro et al. (2014) found a correlation between the amount of free fluid in the abdominal cavity, according to computed tomography, and intraoperative data. This amount was determined by the time from the moment of perforation, the size of the perforation hole, the Mannheim peritonitis index, and subsequently correlated with the incidence of postoperative complications [49].

An ultrasound (US) examination reveals only indirect signs of perforation: thickening of the intestinal wall, the presence of free fluid, and the signs of free gas in the hands of experienced specialists [30]. Some authors noted that the reliability of such ultrasound sign of hollow organ perforation as the presence of gas in the abdominal cavity tends to increase in case of the combination with a number of indirect signs: the presence of free fluid, thickening of the intestinal wall, and a decreased intestinal motility. This method can be indicated as a particularly valuable one for pregnant women and other patients for whom X-ray examination is undesirable [50, 51]. For example, ultrasound has a sensitivity of about 77-98% and a specificity of 80-99% in the diagnosis of acute diverticulitis complications [52, 53].

In doubtful cases, videolaparoscopy is a crucial diagnostic study, which, according to various data, makes it possible to make the correct diagnosis in 98% of cases and determine the optimal surgical tactics, and in 1.6% of cases to continue the operation laparoscopically to repair perforation and eliminate peritonitis [18, 23, 25]. Meanwhile, diagnostic videolaparoscopy is performed most often for suspicion of the most common acute abdominal conditions, such as acute appendicitis, and the true cause of perforation becomes an intraoperative finding [6, 17, 18, 23, 25].

SURGICAL TREATMENT FOR RARE TYPES OF GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT PERFORATION

The main treatment method for gastrointestinal perforations is surgical. Many different methods of surgical treatment have been proposed, but the issues of surgical tactics are still controversial and continue to be discussed by surgeons [54].

For example, in perforated duodenal diverticula, surgeons from Turkey recommend performing diverticulectomy and suturing with a manual or hardware suture, covering the perforation with a strand of omentum; the method of choice may be segmental duodenectomy, duodenojejunostomy [10], and in rare cases even pancreatoduodenal resection [9, 10]. However, no clear criteria for choosing a particular surgical intervention were found.

In contrast, for perforation of small bowel diverticula, Gurala D. et al. recommend performing laparotomy with segmental resection of the small intestine with primary anastomosis. The overall mortality rate after such surgery is 24% due to poor prognostic factors, such as old age and delays in diagnosis and treatment [3]. Alternative surgical methods, such as primary suturing of devirticula perforation, diverticulectomy, and invagination, in Sehgal R. et al. opinion might be associated with extremely poor outcomes and high mortality rates, and should be avoided [12]. At the same time, Russian authors have described successful results of surgical interventions such as suturing the perforating opening, diverticulectomy, resection of the diverticulum with stitching at the base, invagination of diverticula. In their opinion, such a large amount of surgical intervention is appropriate to resort to in the presence of risk factors: the patient's age, the risk of radical surgery in the presence of diffused purulent peritonitis, and the general severity of the condition [6, 55].

With complicated Meckel's diverticulum, there is also no consensus on the choice of surgical intervention. Some authors recommend segmental bowel resection with primary anastomosis for the present inflammatory changes or perforation at the base of the diverticulum. Others propose simple diverticulectomy with transverse suturing of the bowel defect [18].

Various methods of surgical treatment are offered for bowel perforation by a foreign body. The traditional treatment of foreign body perforation is an "open" surgical removal of the foreign body with local intestinal repair: simple suturing or by using suturing devices, wedge-shaped resection, and, in more severe cases, a segmental resection of the intestine or the stoma removal [24, 31, 56]. However, no clear criteria were found for choosing the method of restoring intestinal integrity.

The surgical treatment of the small intestine perforated ulcers most often consists of suturing the perforation hole or resecting the intestinal section that carries the perforation. So, in foreign studies, in Crohn's disease, the preference was given to the intestinal area resection with the primary restoration or removal of the stoma. Simple suturing of the perforation hole is associated with frequent complications and a high postoperative mortality rate [36, 41].

At the same time, in patients with acute ulcers of the small intestine the procedure is most often limited to simple suturing of perforations, especially if they occur in the postoperative period, which is caused by the severe patient condition and the risk of postoperative mortality in cases of major surgery [32]. Russian authors have described cases of simple suturing of the perforation hole [40].

THE ROLE OF LAPAROSCOPIC TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF RARE TYPES OF GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT PERFORATIONS

Currently, there is a tendency in the development of medicine to reduce the traumatic nature of diagnostic and treatment methods for various diseases. Undoubtedly, it should be important for any surgeon both mastering the techniques to perform high-tech surgery, and also achieveing a high level of rehabilitation after these interventions [57].

Since the beginning of the 90s of the last century, reports of laparoscopic operations for peptic ulcer disease began to appear in the literature. These publications covered the issues of suturing the perforation of gastroduodenal ulcers [58, 59]. The use of laparoscopic techniques in suturing a perforated ulcer made it possible to eliminate the contradiction between the minimality of surgical intervention, i.e the application of several stitches, and the traumatic nature of laparotomy [58].

Currently, there are various recommendations for the diagnosis and treatment of perforated gastroduodenal ulcers. For example, P. A. Yartsev et al. (2015) proposed an endoscopic classification of ulcer perforations, considering the diameter of the perforation hole of ≤ 2 mm defined as grade I; 2-5 mm as grade II; 5-10 mm as grade III; > 10 mm as grade IV; and the size of the infiltration billow of ≤ 5 mm defined as type A; from 5-10 mm as type B; > 10 mm as type C). The authors made their choice of the surgical technique based on the developed classification. For ulcers of class IA, IB, or IIA, a closure with Z-suture is indicated. An ulcer of class IC and IIB, the perforation hole is sutured with separate single-row stitches. And in ulcers of class IIIA

and IIIB, it is recommended to suture the perforation with separate double-row stitches. In case of perforated duodenal ulcers of class IIC, IIIC, IVA, IVB, and IVC, a conversion to open surgery is recommended. According to the authors, this approach to the choice of the surgical technique and equipment allows us to standardize the approaches to the treatment of patients with this pathology [60, 61].

Many publications can be found in the literature that address the issues of complications in the treatment of perforated gastroduodenal ulcers, including the perforation suture incompetence, intraabdominal complications, pneumonia, suppuration of postoperative wounds; and there are also interesting data comparing the hospital length of stay and mortality in patients treated by using laparoscopical versus "open" interventions [58].

As for rare perforation types, there are very few publications on their treatment in literature. Thus, in case of a perforation by a foreign body, a number of Russian authors consider the feasibility of video laparoscopic surgery with regard to the time from the onset of the disease, the intraoperative presentation [23, 25, 28, 29, 45, 56]. Foreign authors discuss options for a video laparoscopic approach that include the diagnosis, laparoscopic removal of a foreign body without suturing, simple suturing, and resection of a part of the intestine. [31, 62]. However, even in such studies, it is not always possible to find objective grounds for the choice of treatment method.

Many authors discuss the use of videolaparoscopic techniques, hardware methods of Meckel's diverticulum resection [18, 23, 25, 63].

In their study, Kato K., Cooper M. described a successful video laparoscopic right-sided hemicolectomy performed in a patient with a perforated terminal part of the ileum amid cytomegalovirus infection [64].

It is worth noting that absolute contraindications to the use of laparoscopic treatment for hollow organ perforations are quite rare and in fact do not differ from those for urgent laparoscopy in general. They include total abdominal adhesions, an extremely severe patient condition, and septic shock [58].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thus, despite multiple surgical techniques used for rare types of gastrointestinal perforations, currently the literature has not defined specific criteria for choosing a particular method of intervention. In addition, the long-term results of surgical treatment for rare types of gastrointestinal perforations have not been studied, and clear indications for minimally invasive methods of treatment have not been defined. There are no comparative studies of postoperative outcomes in patients with rare types of perforations, considering the perforation level, time from its onset, and the surgical treatment technique chosen. According to most opinions in the literature, a decisive role in the diagnosis and choice of a surgical technique for rare types of gastrointestinal perforations belongs to videolaparoscopy, as the most informative method.

The specific significance of videolaparoscopy lies in the possibility of combining diagnostic and therapeutic measures – diapeutical method. At the same time, clear indications and contraindications to using laparoscopic access in this pathology have not yet been determined; there are no standardized criteria for using laparoscopy, and the issues of surgical techniques for laparoscopic suturing of various types of GIT hollow organ perforations have not been completed to the full.

Moreover, we should note that having analyzed the available Russian and foreign literature sources, we have found no large-scale studies covering the diagnosis and treatment of rare causes of perforations in Russia and abroad.

CONCLUSION

The lack of unified approaches in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with rare gastrointestinal tract perforations dictates the need for a more in-depth study of this issue in order to optimize the technique of videolaparoscopic diagnostic and treatment approach, considering the etiology of perforation, the level and localization of the perforation hole, the extent of the process, and to develop a therapeutic and diagnostic algorithm in patients with a suspected gastrointestinal tract perforation by using the videolaparoscopic method.

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