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Very late recurrence of gastric cancer with bone marrow involvement and microangiopathic hemolytic anemia as a stem cell disease: a lesson for future

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Introduction:

Gastric adenocarcinoma, is a known aggressive malignancy with local behavior showing systemic relapse in the abdomen and other organs , with bone marrow metastasis being present in only 1 to 11% of cases. The average time of relapse is 3.5 years. [1]

Here, we describe, an interesting case with thrombotic microangiopathic hemolytic anemia, which is a known gastric cancer complication.[4] The mechanisms of this anemia are tumor related effect on endothelial cells.

In this case repot, a very late relapse, is discussed to observe this cancer as a systemic disease even in the early stage of presentation, like breast cancer, and also consider this disease as a new model for the presentation of stem cell theory of cancer progression.

Report of the case:

The patient, a 60 year old male, operated ten years ago as a case of early stage gastric cancer, presented with pallor, jaundice, fatigue and tarry stool from few days prior to admission. The laboratory data were in favor of acute thrombotic microangiopathic hemolytic anemia, and the bone marrow and imaging studies were in favor of activity of gastric cancer (Figures 1-3).

Lab data

White blood cells	31000/ micro litter
Hemoglobin	6gm/dl
Platelet	42000/micro litter
Reticulocyte	12%
Blood Urea	56mg/dl
Creatinine	1mg/dl
Direct Bilirubin	1.8mg/dl
Total Blirubin	5.1mg/dl
Direct Coombs	Negative
Total Serum Protein	6.2gm/dl
Albumin	3.6gm/dl
AST	148U/L
ALT	41U/L
Alkaline Phosphatase	1449u/l
Prothrombin Time	15 second
Partial Thromboplastin Time	56 second
LDH	5000u/l
Fasting blood sugar	182mg/dl

Computerized tomography of abdomen: pleuroperitoneal effusion

Fig 1. : fragmented and nucleated red cells, evidence of thrombotic microangiopathy.

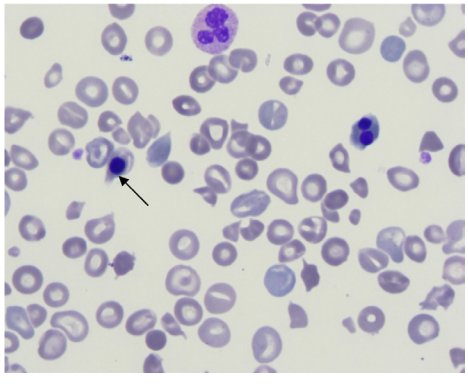

Fig 2. Clusters of tumor cells in the bone marrow of the patient, ten years after primary disease.

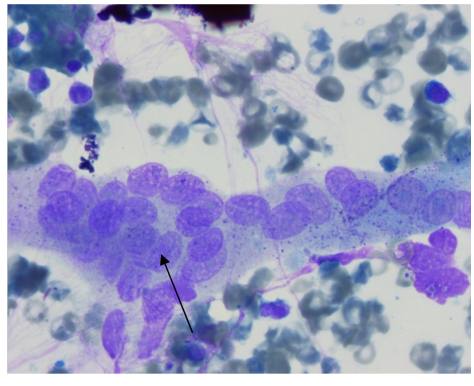

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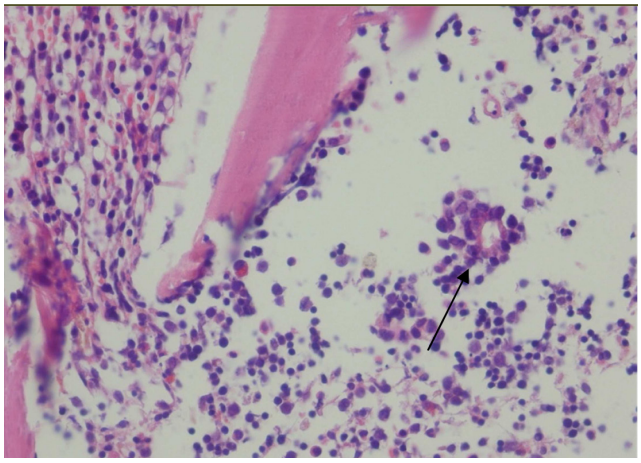
Fig 3. : clusters of malignant cells in the bone marrow biopsy



Discussion

From three decades ago it has been determined that 1% of leukemia cells might grow into colonies in vitro with ability to make new tumor cells and the hypothesis of cancer stem cells theory arises from this observation.

Houghton et al. have recently reported that similar stem cells may give rise to gastric cells originating from hematopoietic tissue.

Attached to the stem cell theory and gastric cancer is the infection with helicobacter pylori with near eighty percent of gastric cancer patients having a history of infection with this organism.

The association between the helicobacter pylori and gastric cancer is well- known.[5] The stem cell theory denotes that H. pylori induced inflammation in the gastric mucosa causes migration of the hematopoietic stem cells to the injured area to help the repair, and in this new environment sometimes these cells undergo genetic damage and acquire malignant behavior.[6] After the surgical and medical treatment of the primary tumor some dormant cancer cells remain viable and later proliferate and form a clinical relapse. [7]

Tumor late recurrence is not usual in solid tumors, except in breast cancer, and usually happens after 5 years of remission, but such a recurrence after 10 years reminds us, the theory of viability of tumor dormancy with a mechanism of cancer stem cell. This aspect is important in future for the therapeutic strategy utilized for this cancer.

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