

Rare Small Cell Neuroendocrine Cervical Cancer - Hiding in Plain Sight

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Small cell neuroendocrine cervical cancer (SCNECC) is a rare and aggressive disease. It usually causes symptoms when it has metastasized, but is often mistaken for uterine fibroids, making diagnosis difficult.

Our case is about a 38-year-old female who previously presented to multiple emergency departments with complaints of shoulder and back pain that did not improve with medications. She then developed vaginal bleeding which was not concerning to the patient since her periods were regular while having a copper IUD in place. However, her back pain progressed, causing her to have leg weakness and fall multiple times. She went back to the emergency department where CT and MRI scans showed a metastatic lesion in her T6 vertebrae causing cord compression, and diffuse spondylosis. The patient was taken to surgery immediately, and biopsy results showed metastatic neuroendocrine cancer.

The patient's vaginal bleeding prompted further workup. Pelvic ultrasound and CT scan of the pelvis confirmed multiple fibroids and an intrauterine device was seen. She was taken to the operating room for a pelvic exam that noted a 20+ week sized globular uterus with an irregular 3-4 cm mass. Stained biopsy from the cervix showed HPV-negative small cell neuroendocrine cervical cancer. A multi-disciplinary team from seven specialties were consulted. She received palliative radiation and started on chemotherapy. However, the patient developed worsening musculoskeletal pain, neutropenic fever requiring multiple hospitalizations, and was ultimately transitioned to hospice care.

This case demonstrated the difficulty in diagnosing an extremely rare cancer that was confounded by a prior diagnosis of fibroids, musculoskeletal pain, and a copper IUD. A thorough history and physical exam, detailed chart review, and the utilization of a multidisciplinary team were essential in the patient's care. Because of the aggressiveness and limited treatment for SCNECC, this case will hopefully raise awareness about this devastating disease.