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# **ADENOSQUAMOUS CARCINOMA OF THE NASAL** SEPTUM: A RARE VARIANT.

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# ABSTRACT

Adenosquamous carcinoma is a rare variant of squamous cell carcinoma of the nasal septum which is very aggressive and metastasise early. We present a case of a gentleman who presented with left nasal septal swelling for 4 months. Examination showed a lesion at the left nasal septum extending to the dorsum of the nose and right upper lip region. Computed tomography scan of the paranasal sinuses and neck showed an enhancing lesion with ulceration at the left nasal septum, with regional metastasis to the neck. He underwent a subtotal rhinectomy, inferior maxillectomy, and bilateral modified radical neck dissection type III. Unfortunately, he succumbed to a cardiac arrest 5 days after surgery.

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# ABSTRACT

Adenosquamous carcinoma is a rare variant of squamous cell carcinoma of the nasal septum which is very aggressive and metastasise early with poor prognosis. We present a case of a gentleman who presented with left nasal septal swelling for 4 months. Examination showed a lesion at the left nasal septum extending to the dorsum of the nose and right upper lip region. Computed tomography scan of the paranasal sinuses and neck showed an enhancing lesion with ulceration at the left nasal septum, with regional metastasis to the neck. He underwent a subtotal rhinectomy, inferior maxillectomy, and bilateral modified radical neck dissection type III. Unfortunately, he succumbed to a cardiac arrest 5 days after surgery.

# Keywords: Adenosquamous carcinoma, Advance stage, Rhinectomy, Nasal septum, Squamous cell carcinoma.

## INTRODUCTION

Malignancy of the nasal septum are infrequently encountered, and it comprises less than 10% of sinonasal malignancies.<sup>1</sup> The most common type of malignancy is the squamous cell carcinoma. The adenosquamous variant of the squamous cell carcinoma is very

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rare. Only about a hundred cases in the head and neck region are reported so far in literature. When present, it is known to be extremely aggressive and shows very rapid local and distant spread with poor prognosis.<sup>2</sup> We present a case of a 72-year old gentleman who presented with a nasal septal adenosquamous carcinoma, stage IVA (T4a N2c M0), who underwent a subtotal rhinectomy, inferior maxillectomy, and bilateral modified radical neck dissection type III, but succumbed to a cardiac arrest 5 days after surgery.

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Figure 1: (A) Lesion at the dorsum of the nose with central ulceration (yellow arrow). (B) Nasoendoscopy showing a left septal mass with visible vessels on its surface (red arrow).

# **CASE REPORT**

A 72-year-old Malay gentleman, with underlying diabetes mellitus, hypertension and ischaemic heart disease, presented with history of progressive left-sided nasal blockage for 4 months. It was associated with nasal pain, swelling and left blood-stained nasal discharge. Otherwise, there was no associated history of foul smelly rhinorrhea, headache, visual impairment, hyposmia, epiphora, facial numbness or neck swelling. He was a nonsmoker, however, he worked as a farmer with prolonged exposure to pesticides.

Examination of the nose showed nasal tip depression, and a lesion at the dorsum of the nose measuring 2 x 2 cm with central ulceration (Figure 1A). Anterior rhinoscopy revealed a mass extending from the left nasal septum to the columella and the right upper lip region. It was firm-to-hard in consistency, erythematous and was tender on palpation. Nasoendoscopy showed a mass at the left nasal septum about 2 x 2cm, extending superiorly to the roof of the nasal septum, inferiorly to the floor of nasal cavity, and posteriorly to posterior half of the septum (Figure 1B). Otherwise, the bilateral inferior turbinates, osteomeatal complexes, nasopharynx and Fossa of Rosenmuller were normal. Intraoral examination showed normal hard and soft palates and oropharynx. Upon examination of the neck, there was a painless palpable 2x1cm neck lymphadenopathy at right level Ib.

Radiological assessment via contrastenhanced computed tomography (CECT) scan of the nose and paranasal sinuses revealed an enhancing soft tissue lesion at the left side of the cartilaginous nasal septum, measuring 4.4 x 2.7 x 4.7 cm (AP x W x CC) (Figure 2). There was involvement of external nasal cartilages, the subcutaneous tissue and the skin of the nose, with partial encasement of bilateral nostrils. Posteriorly, there was encasement and erosion of the anterior part of the bony nasal septum. Superiorly, the lesion abuts the nasal bone with bony erosion demonstrated. Inferiorly, there was erosion of the anterior cortex of the hard palate. Antero-inferiorly, it involved the philtrum and encroached the upper lip with no clear fat plane demonstrated.



Figure 2: Axial (A), coronal (B) and sagittal (C) views of CECT scan of the nose and paranasal sinuses showing the enhancing soft tissue lesion (red arrows) at the left side of the cartilaginous nasal septum. (Click on image to enlarge)

There were enlarged bilateral level Ib lymph nodes, measuring 1.2cm in largest diameter, with subcentimeter level II and III nodes, clinically Stage IVA (T4a N2c M0). Otherwise, there were no distant metastases noted on CECT scan of the thorax, abdomen, pelvis and bony structures.

Multiple biospsies of the left nasal mass revealed multiple fragments of tumour tissue partly covered by stratified squamous epithelium with intermingling respiratory type epithelium. These features favoured the clinical diagnosis of a nasal septal adenosquamous carcinoma. The patient was consented and underwent a subtotal rhinectomy, inferior left maxillectomy, bilateral modified radical neck dissection type III and local upper lip advancement flap. Unfortunately, the patient succumbed to a cardiac event 5 days postsurgery.

Histopathological examination of the resected specimen showed a tumour tissue covered partly by stratified squamous epithelium and partly by respiratory-type columnar epithelium, with presence of adnexal structures of sebaceous glands and hair follicles (Figure 3). These tissues were infiltrated by malignant cells arranged in irregular clusters and many forming central lumen or glandular structures. The cells in tight irregular clusters showed squamoid differentiation with polygonal shape and dense eosinophilic cytoplasm and individual keratinization. The surrounding stroma showed desmoplastic reaction which was heavily infiltrated by plasmolymphocytic cells, and presence of seromucinous glands. The neoplastic cells exhibit moderate nuclear pleomorphism, mitosis, vesicular nuclei and prominent nucleoli. Immunohistochemistry studies showed the neoplastic cells were positive for p40, p16, CK 5/6, CK7, EMA and CEA (Figure 4 and 5). The superior, inferior and left lateral margins were involved by the tumour, however, other margins were clear. No malignancy was seen in all the lymph nodes dissected.

### DISCUSSION

Adenosquamous carcinoma (ASC) is a rare variant of squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), and the WHO has defined it as a malignant tumour with mixed differentiation of both SCC and true adenocarcinoma, with both components occurring in close proximity but distinct

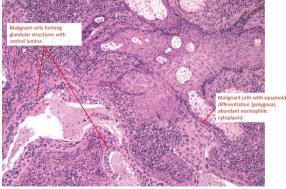


Figure 3: Histopathological findings of tumour tissue with both stratified squamous and respiratory-type columnar epithelium differentiation. (Click on image to enlarge)

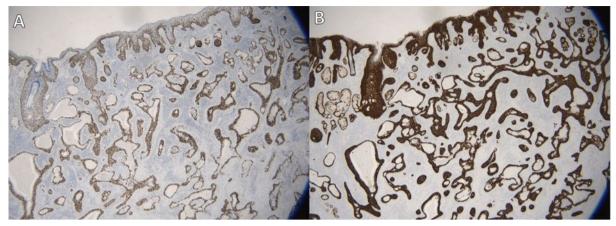


Figure 4: Immunohistochemistry studies show the neoplastic cells are positive for p40 (A) and CK5/6 (B) showing the squamous component of the tumour.

from one another. Gerughty et al in 1968 first described it as a type of malignant salivary gland tumor.<sup>2</sup> The most common sites of occurrence of this malignancy are at the head and neck region, and the subsites that are frequently involved include larynx (48.4%), followed by the oral cavity (30%). The nose and paranasal sinuses are rare sites for occurrence of this tumour, making the present case a unique and interesting one. To date, only 7 cases have been reported in literature.<sup>3</sup> It has a predilection among the male population with a male to female ratio of between 9:1 and 2:1. The median age of occurrence is about 60 years.<sup>4</sup> Risk factors for these tumours include cigarette smoking and exposure to wood dust, nickel, and chemical solvents.<sup>5</sup> In our case, the prolonged expo-

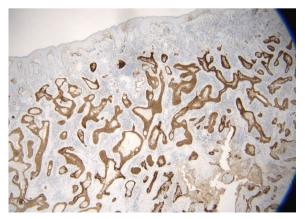


Figure 5: Immunohistochemistry studies show the neoplastic cells are positive for p16, which is a surrogate marker for *Human papillomavirus* infection. (Click on image to enlarge)

sure to chemical solvents in pesticides may be a risk factor.

Histologically, diagnosis of ASC requires two distinct components. Squamous cell carcinoma is usually the predominant subtype, which may be well or poorly differentiated. The squamous epithelium is characterized by two or more of the following features, which are; intercellular bridging, formation of keratin pearls, parakeratotic differentiation, individual cell keratinisation and cellular arrangements which show pavement or mosaic pattern. The adenocarcinomatous component may show a tubular, alveolar and/ or glandular morphology. The gland formation, predominantly in the deepest neoplastic areas, classically consists of 'punched out' spaces with smooth edges. Mucin production is typically present. The glandular epithelium shows characteristic demonstration of intracytoplasmic or intraductal sialomucin by high iron diamine (alcian blue or periodic acid-Schiff stain retention after diastase digestion) and Mayer's mucicarmine.<sup>6</sup> These tumours always have infiltrating margins, usually with solid small tumour nests or thin trabeculae in a desmoplastic stroma, as is noted in our case.

Among the differential diagnoses of ASC are salivary gland mucoepidermoid carci-

noma (MEC) and acantholytic and basaloid squamous cell carcinoma. MEC are composed predominantly of intermediate or epidermoid cells but without keratin formation. MEC usually has a lobular pattern and infiltrates forming wide sheets of neoplastic cells with round contours; but lacks the severe dysplasia or carcinoma in situ component that is found in ASC. It is crucial to differentiate between these two entities as ASC is a very aggressive tumour with a worse prognosis than highgrade MEC. To differentiate from SCC, besides the presence of mucin production; immunohistochemical staining of ASC shows positivity for CEA (92%), CK7 (75%) and CAM 5.2 (58%), while SCC, though positive for CK 5/6 and p40; is either negative or fo-

molecular weight cytokeratin 34BE12 is positive in both ASC and SCC.<sup>7</sup>

cally reactive for these markers. The high

Nasal obstruction is the commonest symptom at presentation, followed by epistaxis. In patients with more advanced diseases, they may present with nasal swelling, epiphora, diplopia, proptosis, or palatal ulceration. Upon examination, a nasal mass is the most common finding, followed by nasal septal ulcers. Endoscopic nasal examination is useful to aid in the diagnosis. Definitive diagnosis is made by histopathological examination.<sup>8</sup> CECT and magnetic resonance imaging are useful to evaluate the extent and the characteristics of the tumour. Pre-operatively, they are helpful to rule out anatomical variations and assist in surgical planning.

Treatment includes surgery, radiation therapy or combined therapies. Surgical resection with one centimeter margins and the removal of full thickness mucosa, cartilage and/or bone is the preferred choice of treatment modality as the septum is easily accessible.<sup>1</sup> Some smaller lesions could be completely excised with wide local resection and frozen sections. In some early-stage diseases, endoscopic resection provides good tuTreatment includes surgery, radiation therapy or combined therapies. Surgical resection with one centimeter margins and the removal of full thickness mucosa, cartilage and/or bone is the preferred choice of treatment modality as the septum is easily accessible.<sup>1</sup> Some smaller lesions could be completely excised with wide local resection and frozen sections. In some early-stage diseases, endoscopic resection provides good tumour control and is cosmetically favourable.<sup>3,8</sup>

Rhinectomy is indicated if the anterior nasal bone is involved, and in large anterosuperior nasal septum malignancies.<sup>9</sup> Postoperative radiotherapy is required in large tumours (AJCC Stage T3 or greater), tumours in which one-centimeter clear resection margin is not achieved, tumours which involved critical regions like the anterior skull base and orbit; tumours with lymph node metastasis, and recurrent disease.<sup>10</sup> Reconstruction is offered after all tumour treatment is completed to avoid compromising tumour treatment.<sup>11</sup>

Only small accessible lesions of the nasal septum are treated primarily by radiotherapy as a single modality of treatment. However, radiotherapy is not indicated in superior nasal septum tumours due to the proximity of the optic chiasm. Side effects of radiotherapy such as chronic nasal pain, periorbital swelling and blindness have been reported. Systemic therapy is not routinely used in managing these tumours.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, these tumours are extremely aggressive and highly malignant. Some of these tumours harbour *Human papillomavirus* and show overexpression of p16. However, unlike oropharyngeal cancers that are HPVrelated, this does not seem to be a good marker of prognosis. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, should our case survive the initial surgery, he should be planned for adjuvant radiotherapy as well. ASC have a high propensity to recur. 47% of patients developed local recurrence, while 65% developed nodal metastasis and 23% experienced distant metastasis, with a 5 -year survival rate of 13%. Therefore, early and frequent follow-up is vital.<sup>14</sup>

# CONCLUSION

Adenosquamous carcinoma of the nasal septum is an extremely rare tumour that histologically incorporates both squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinomatous morphology. It is known to be locally aggressive and highly malignant. Early detection, with surgery and radiotherapy offers the best hope for long term survival.

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Authors' contribution: WKYR, AZAB, NEH and SRSAR contributed to the concept, design and drafting of the manuscript. WKYR, AZAB, EK and HA were involved in clinical and surgical management of the patient. WKYR and AZAB contributed to obtaining the clinical and radiological images. AA contributed to providing the histopathological examination report and microscopic pictures. IM provided the academic input. All authors revised and approved the final manuscript.

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# **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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