IMAGES IN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGY

Intervertebral Vacuum Phenomenon: A Cause of Bulging of the Pharyngeal Wall

Fenómeno de vacío intervertebral: una causa de abombamiento de la pared faríngea

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We present the case of a 58 year old patient, an active smoker, with suspected clinical and radiological evidence of Langerhans cell histiocytosis. During a diagnostic fibrobronchoscopy a bulging of the left posterolateral hypopharynx was observed which partially obliterated the ipsilateral pyriform sinus. An examination by direct laryngoscopy ruled out pharyngeal or laryngeal tumours. A CT scan of the neck detected the presence of gas at disk space level C5–C6 (Fig. 1A, arrow) with its extrusion into the prevertebral space (Fig. 1A, asterisk), related to intervertebral vacuum

Figure 1


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phomenon (IVP). The extruded gas (Fig. 1B, asterisk) displaced the left posterolateral wall of the hypopharynx (Fig. 1B, arrows).

Intervertebral vacuum phenomenon (IVP) consists in the accumulation of gas (essentially nitrogen) on the inside of an intervertebral disk and is a common occurrence in adults over the age of 40. The most usual cause of IVP is degenerative disk disease and its most common location is in the lumbar region. The accumulated gas in the disk space may spread to the spinal canal, to the invertebral foramina and to the epidural or subdural space, but we have found no previous descriptions of migration and accumulation of gas to the prevertebral space with secondary compression of the pyriform sinus.