September 2022 Medical Image of the Month: Epiglottic Calcification

In consideration of dysphagia, most cases predominate in the oropharyngeal region with the remainder caused primarily by esophageal causes. Lesser known and studied is the development of dysphagia and globus sensation from epiglottic pathology, namely epiglottic calcification. With less than a dozen published cases in literature, very little data exists on identification, diagnosis, and treatment of this known cause of morbidity. Here we present a case of oropharyngeal dysphagia arising from a rare cause, epiglottic calcification.

An 81-year-old man with a history of aortic stenosis and carotid artery stenosis presented with worsening dysphagia over the course of one month. The patient reported significant dysphagia, initially to solids and subsequently to liquids causing a weight loss of over 50 pounds. Physical exam of the oropharynx and neck were...
unremarkable. A bedside swallow evaluation suggested mildly decreased hyolaryngeal movement, but no other significant abnormalities. A barium swallow study revealed incomplete epiglottic excursion during the pharyngeal phase of swallowing. The patient then underwent evaluation with a contrast-enhanced esophagogram, which showed severe esophageal dysmotility and gastroesophageal reflux. A CT of the neck demonstrated calcification of the epiglottis without epiglottal enlargement. ENT was consulted, the patient underwent flexible fiberoptic laryngoscopy and also EGD with biopsy. No other esophageal or gastric pathology were identified other than the epiglottic calcification. As no effective treatment is known at this time, the patient was changed to a modified diet with ongoing speech and swallow therapy as an outpatient.

Epiglottic calcification is a rare cause of dysphagia that is poorly understood in its etiology, clinical course and outcome1. This case demonstrates that despite consultant team recommendations, no clear evaluation pathway or treatment currently exists. Currently, diagnosis can be accomplished with radiologic evaluation along with exclusion of other causes; however, no definitive treatments are available for this rare condition. Although the condition itself is rare, epiglottic calcification should be considered when other more common causes of significant dysphagia are ruled out.