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Opinion Article

Clinical Manifestations and Complications of Hirschsprung Disease in Pediatric Patients

Yang Liu*

Department of Gastroenterological Surgery, Kumamoto University, Kumamoto, Japan

ABOUT THE STUDY

Hirschsprung Disease (HD), also known as congenital aganglionic megacolon, is a developmental disorder characterized by the absence of ganglion cells in a segment of the large intestine. This results in functional obstruction and impaired motility of the affected intestinal segment. HD is primarily a pediatric condition and typically presents with various clinical manifestations and potential complications.

Clinical manifestations

The clinical presentation of Hirschsprung disease can vary depending on the extent and location of the affected intestinal segment. In infants, the most common early symptom is failure to pass meconium (the first stool) within 24 to 48 hours after birth. As the disease progresses, infants may experience symptoms such as constipation, abdominal distension, poor feeding, and vomiting. Chronic constipation, often characterized by the passage of small, pellet-like stools, may persist beyond the neonatal period. In some cases, Hirschsprung disease may not be diagnosed in the newborn period, and symptoms may present later in infancy or childhood. These symptoms can include chronic constipation, abdominal pain, distension, and episodes of explosive diarrhea. Children with HD may also exhibit poor weight gain, growth retardation, and signs of malnutrition due to the impaired absorption and motility of the affected bowel segment.

Complications

If left untreated or undiagnosed, Hirschsprung disease can lead to several complications, which can vary in severity. Some common complications associated with HD include:

Enterocolitis: Enterocolitis is a serious complication of Hirschsprung disease characterized by inflammation and infection of the bowel. It can present with symptoms such as fever, abdominal distension, explosive diarrhea, and rectal bleeding. Enterocolitis requires urgent medical attention and can be life-threatening if not treated promptly.

Intestinal obstruction: The absence of ganglion cells in the affected intestinal segment leads to functional obstruction and can result in the accumulation of stool, gas, and fluid, leading to intestinal obstruction. This can manifest as severe abdominal distension, vomiting, and abdominal pain. Intestinal obstruction may require surgical intervention to relieve the obstruction.

Megacolon: Megacolon refers to the abnormal enlargement and dilation of the colon. In Hirschsprung disease, the segment of the colon proximal to the affected area may become dilated due to chronic obstruction. Megacolon can cause further complications such as chronic constipation, fecal impaction, and bowel perforation.

Growth and nutritional deficiencies: Children with Hirschsprung disease may experience growth retardation and nutritional deficiencies due to impaired absorption and motility of the affected bowel segment. Malabsorption of essential nutrients can lead to deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and calories, affecting overall growth and development.

Psychological and social impact: Living with a chronic condition such as Hirschsprung disease can have a psychological and social impact on pediatric patients and their families. Children may experience emotional distress, anxiety, and challenges related to body image, self-esteem, and social interactions. Supportive care and counseling play a crucial role in addressing these psychological aspects.

Hirschsprung disease in pediatric patients presents with various clinical manifestations and can lead to potential complications if left untreated. Early recognition and diagnosis of HD are essential for prompt management and prevention of complications.

Pediatric patients with Hirschsprung disease may experience symptoms such as constipation, abdominal distension, and poor weight gain. Complications can include enterocolitis, intestinal obstruction, megacolon, growth and nutritional deficiencies, and psychological and social impact.

Correspondence to: Yang Liu, Department of Gastroenterological Surgery, Kumamoto University, Kumamoto, Japan, E-mail: Yangliu999@gmail.com

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