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Retroperitoneal tumors: uncommon cause of low back pain - a three case series report

L Costa, Diana Duarte, C Morgado, M Ferreira, A Moniz

USF Tejo, Lisbon, Portugal

Corresponding author: Dr Luísa Costa, USF Tejo, MGF, Sacavém, Portugal. E-mail:

luisa_gc@live.com.pt

Introduction: Low back pain is a major health problem, as 60% to 80% of the population will experience it at some point of their lives. The differential diagnosis of lower back pain is extensive, but a history of constitutional symptoms or unusual signs should prompt a work-up for rare causes.

Cases Presentation: We present a case series of three patients (72-year-old woman, 63-year-old woman and 55-year-old man), who presented with mild to severe low back pain, with early onset and no response to empirical analgesia, associated with sudden weight loss. An abdominal tomography was performed on three patients and shown a bulky right mass, without defined origin. Patients were referred for surgical consultation and diagnosed with retroperitoneal tumor (RT).

Accordingly, they underwent staging that identified a malignant mass (right psoas and vena cava inferior sarcoma and right psoas schwannoma). Mass excision was performed.

Discussion: The incidence of RT is extremely low (0.01-0.2% of all neoplasias) and two thirds are malignant. One third of RT are sarcomas and only 1-10% are schwannomas. RT constitute an atypical and unrecognized cause of low back pain, so the diagnosis is delayed until tumor had a substantial size and invaded the intraperitoneal organs.

Complete surgical resection is the only potential curative treatment. The family doctor should be aware of rare causes for a common symptom, such low back pain, particularly if accompanied by red flags, and provide prompt referral to hospital care in order to increase the chance of cure.