

TITLE: ACCESORY ATLANTO-OCCIPITAL JOINT AS A CAUSE OF CERVICAL PAIN.

Background: Congenital malformations of the craniocervical junction have a prevalence of 0.75-4%. Most cases are asymptomatic, and their diagnosis come from an incidental finding during a radiological study after cervical trauma. Despite this, its knowledge should not be anecdotal and is mandatory for cervical spine surgeons. The literature is scarce, most of publications being clinical cases and anthropometric studies.

Design: Case report and review of the literature.

Methods: We present the case of a 31-year-old man who 3 years ago began with sudden and progressive pain in the right interscapular and retromastoid area with no other symptoms. On physical examination, he did not present any warning signs, as well as complete cervical mobility, painful right retromastoid prominence, and normal neurological examination. Plain radiography and MRI studies disclosed no significant findings. Initially, the patient was advised to take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and rehabilitation. Owing to persistence of pain, a corticoanesthetic infiltration was performed in the retromastoid painful point with temporary improvement of symptoms. Given the reappearance of pain, new tests were requested. An ultrasound study aimed at the paracervical muscles showed a bony protrusion at the right lateral level of the axis, for which a cervical CT study was expanded showing a right occipital paracondylar process was observed articulating with a C1 transverse megapophysis.

Result: The delay in diagnosis was 17 months from the first consultation. Given the improvement with the corticoanesthetic infiltration, a local radiofrequency denervation was performed allowing to relief the symptoms. Our literature review showed only 6 clinical cases of lateral accesory atlanto-occipital joint, two of which ending in surgical treatment.

Discussion: Craniocervical congenital malformations are rare, and the spine surgeon must be familiar with them as a possible cause of pain.