

Rapid Communication

Hyperthyroidism and Thyroid Cancer in the Congolese Hospital Setting

Kakamba JB^{1,7*}, Bangolo AI^{2*}, Sabbah N³,
Waykole T², Nkodila A⁵, Mbunga B⁵, Atoot A⁶,
Ahmed M², Atoot A², Bayauli P¹ and M'buyamba
JR¹

¹Department of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Nuclear
Medicine, Kinshasa University Clinics, Kinshasa, DR
Congo

²Department of Internal Medicine, Hackensack
University Medical Center/Palisades Medical Center,
North Bergen, NJ, USA

³Department of Endocrinology, Metabolism and
Nutrition, Cayenne Hospital Centers, Cayenne, French
Guiana

⁴Department of Pathology, Kinshasa University Clinics,
Kinshasa, DR Congo

⁵School of Public Health, University of Kinshasa,
Kinshasa, DR Congo

⁶Department of Anesthesia, Hackensack University
Medical Center, Hackensack, NJ, USA

⁷Department of Endocrinology, University of Liege, Liege,
Belgium

*Corresponding author: John Bukasa Kakamba,
Department of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Nuclear
Medicine, Kinshasa University Clinics, Kinshasa, DR
Congo; Department of Endocrinology, University of
Liege, Liege, Belgium

Ayrton I Bangolo, Department of Internal Medicine,
Hackensack University Medical Center/Palisades Medical
Center, North Bergen, NJ, USA

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List of Abbreviations

DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo; SPSS: Statistical Package
for the Social Sciences; M: Male; F: Female; MNG: Multinodular
Goiter; TA: Toxic Adenoma; LAD: Lymphadenopathy

Introduction

Thyroid cancer accounts for 1% of cancers worldwide [1].
Hyperthyroidism was long considered a protective factor against
thyroid cancer. This association was rare in the literature and raised a
lot of controversy in the scientific world [2,3]. In recent times, several
researchers have noted this association through their observations.
Thyroid cancer has been associated with graves' disease, toxic
nodule, and toxic multinodular goiter [4]. But the prevalence of
this association varies according to the studies and the geographic
location, between 2.6-13.6% [4].

A Chinese study by Yeh et al., had found a high incidence of
cancer in hyperthyroid patients and in particular thyroid cancer.
According to the same author, the longer the hyperthyroidism
persists, the greater the risk of developing thyroid cancer [5].

Abstract

Background: Hyperthyroidism was long considered a protective factor for
the development of thyroid cancer. The association between hyperactive thyroid
and cancer was rare. More recent studies have highlighted an association
between hyperthyroidism and development of cancers, especially thyroid
cancer. Given the lack of publication on the association of hyperthyroidism
and thyroid cancer in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the present
study was carried out to confirm the existence of this association in Congolese
hospitals.

Methods: This is a retrospective and descriptive study, which involved 106
cases of thyroid cancer recorded in the anatomopathology registers of four
laboratories in the city of Kinshasa between 2005 and 2019. The p-value <0.05
was considered as the threshold of statistical significance.

Results: Out of 106 cases of thyroid cancer, the association of
hyperthyroidism and thyroid cancer was found in 5 cases (4.7%) (3.6% for
women vs. 9% for men). The mean age of patients with this association was
51 ± 11 years. Papillary carcinoma (two cases), follicular carcinoma (two cases)
and lymphoma (one case) were the types of cancer encountered. Etiologically,
toxic multinodular goiter (four cases: 80%) and toxic adenoma (one case: 2%)
were found.

Conclusion: There is an association between hyperthyroidism and thyroid
cancer in the Congolese hospital setting. There is a predominance of the female
gender. There were an equal number of papillary and follicular carcinomas.
With this study, we hope to encourage clinicians to thoroughly evaluate any
suspicious nodule associated with hyperthyroidism.

Keywords: Thyroid cancer; Hyperthyroidism; Democratic Republic of
Congo; Goiter

There are currently no studies carried out in the Congolese
hospital setting to establish the association between hyperthyroidism
and thyroid cancer. We hypothesize that there is an association
between thyroid cancer and hyperthyroidism in the Congolese
hospital setting.

Methods

This is a descriptive and retrospective study, which involved 106
cases of thyroid cancer who underwent partial or total thyroidectomy
and pathological examination in four laboratories in the city of
Kinshasa between 2005 and 2019. These laboratories receive samples
from all the medical centers in Kinshasa. The study included patients
with medical records containing clinical data such as sex, age and
province of origin, the diagnosis of the attending physician, the
results of the thyroid ultrasound and the pathological examination.

Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses of the data were performed using Statistical
Package for the social sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 22
software. Data were expressed as mean +/- standard deviation
for metric parameters, and as absolute or relative frequencies in

percentages for categorical parameters. For all tests used the p-value <0.05 was considered as the threshold of statistical significance.

Results

In the anatomopathology records of four laboratories in the city of Kinshasa between 2005 and 2019, 106 cases of thyroid cancer were reported, including 84 women (79.2%) and 22 men (20.8%). Of all thyroid cancer cases, five (4.7%) also had hyperthyroidism.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of patients with hyperthyroidism and thyroid cancer. The association of hyperthyroidism and thyroid cancer involved three female patients (3/88 = 3.6%) and two male patients (2/22 = 9%). The mean age of patients with this association was 51 ± 11 years (range: 37 and 67 years). Papillary carcinoma (two cases), follicular carcinoma (two cases) and lymphoma (one case) were the types of cancer observed. Etiologically, toxic multinodular goiter (four cases: 80%) and toxic adenoma (one case: 20%) were the main causes of hyperthyroidism. All the nodules found were greater than 10 mm in size and were solid and hypoechoic. One case of microcalcification and two cases of satellite cervical lymphadenopathy associated with papillary carcinoma have been reported.

Discussion

Our study aimed to establish the association between thyroid cancer and hyperthyroidism, and establish the clinical, ultrasound and pathological features of these cancers. This association has been found in several series around the world [1-14] but no such study has been carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The average age of patients with cancer is 51.2 ± 11.4 in our study, this age average deviates from that found in the Haraj et al. series and the Touati series who had an average age of 44.8 years [2] and 45.76 [1] respectively. This difference can be explained by the smaller size of our study. Thyroid cancer is twice as common in women as men [15], a female predominance was also noted in our study. Similar results were found in two African studies as well [1,2].

The etiological diagnosis of hyperthyroidism associated with cancer in our study is 100% toxic nodules, 80% of which are multinodular and 20% are single nodules. Similar results were found in the Aksoy et al. study, where the most common etiology of hyperthyroidism associated with cancer was multinodular goiter with a frequency of 63.7% [7]. Many studies also found a multinodular predominance [4,6,7,14]. However, in most series, Grave's disease was predominant regardless of the number of nodules found [2,4,6,7,12,13]. Our study did not find a single patient with Grave's disease in the cancer population. This could be considered a particularity of our study.

All the malignant nodules in our study are macronodules. Those results contrast with those found in the Aksoy and Berker series, where most cancers were microcarcinomas [7,13].

80% of cancers in our study are differentiated, of which 50% are papillary and 50% are follicular carcinomas. The equal frequency in follicular and papillary carcinomas was not found in many studies. In many series, there was a predominance of the papillary carcinoma [1,2,7,10] similar to findings in the literature [15].

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Certain limitations must be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The study is based on data collected from the records of 4 Anatomopathology laboratories in the city of Kinshasa. The paucity of clinical data is part of the weaknesses of this retrospective study in which investigators are unable to administer a questionnaire to patients. Given the non-representativeness of our sample, we do not see to what extent our results can be extrapolated to all Congolese cancer patients in hospitals. Data on the classification of thyroid cancers according to the size of the tumor and the presence of lymph nodes and distant metastases were not found. Data on the treatment options adopted for each cancer case was not found. However, this study has the merit of collecting data in the main pathology laboratories which examine all the biopsies in the city of Kinshasa. Our results support the possible existence of hyperthyroidism and thyroid cancer.

Conclusion

The association of hyperthyroidism and thyroid cancer exists in Congolese hospitals. Women in their fifties are most affected. The differentiated thyroid cancer (with equal frequency between papillary and follicular carcinoma) is the most implicated in this association (Supplementary Table 1).

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: This research protocol was approved by the National Health Ethics Committee of the DRC No. 197/CNES/BN/PMMF/2020.

Consent for publication: Written informed consent was obtained from the patients for publication of this study.

Availability of data and materials: All data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding authors upon request.

Authors' contributions: John Bukasa and Ayrton Bangolo searched the literature, wrote, and revised the manuscript. Nadia Sabbah, Branly Mbuya, Trupti Waykole, Aliocha Nkodila and Ali Atoot revised and edited the manuscript. Adam Atoot, Pascal Bayauli and Jean René M'buyamba revised and approved the final version and are the article's guarantors. All authors certify that they contributed sufficiently to the intellectual content and data analysis. Each author has reviewed the final version of the manuscript and approves it for publication.

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