A case of chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) in a Maltese dog

Ji-Yun Lee, Eun-Sil Hong, Byeong-Teck Kang, Dong-in Jung, Chul Park, Hee-Myung Park*

Department of Veterinary Internal Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, Konkuk University, Seoul 143-701, Korea

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Abstract: An 11-year-old, 3.3 kg, male Maltese dog was referred to Veterinary Teaching Hospital of Konkuk University because of diarrhea and severe anemia. Abnormal physical examination findings included left submandibular lymph node enlargement, pale mucous membrane, cataract, and bloody diarrhea. Results of hematologic examination revealed a marked lymphocytosis resulting in leukocytosis and the markedly increased numbers of small, well-differentiated lymphocytes in the peripheral blood. Serum biochemical abnormalities consisted of elevated AST and ALP, hyperphosphatemia, hypoglycemia, and hypoalbuminemia. Radiographic examination showed cardiomegaly and hepatosplenomegaly. Results of urinalysis included bilirubinuria and proteinuria. Based on results of examination described above, chronic lymphocytic leukemia was diagnosed. Chemotherapy was initiated with cyclophosphamide (300 mg/m^2, IV once every 2 weeks), vincristine (0.75 mg/m^2, IV once every 2 weeks, alternating weeks with the cyclophosphamide), and plus prednisolone (50 mg/m^2, PO, SID for a week, then 20 mg/m^2, PO every other day). The response to chemotherapy was partially present. This study first demonstrates clinicopathological findings and chemotherapeutic response of chronic lymphocytic leukemia in Korea.

Key words: chronic lymphocytic leukemia, chemotherapy, dog

Introduction

Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) is a form of leukemia characterized by abnormal proliferation of small lymphocytes in bone marrow. Although morphologically normal, these lymphocytes have functional abnormalities [10]. The clinical presentations are nonspecific and can include peripheral lymphadenopathy, hepatosplenomegaly, lymphocytosis, anemia, thrombocytopenia, and increased lymphocyte proliferation in bone marrow [6].

However, some dogs and cats are asymptomatic and a diagnosis is found incidentally following routine blood work. The markedly elevated numbers of small, well-differentiated lymphocytes in the blood formed the basis for the diagnosis of lymphocytic leukemia. Hematologically, a normocytic, normochromic, nonregenerative anemia usually accompanies a marked mature peripheral lymphocytosis, which may range from 100,000 to 300,000/µl or more [5].

According to a previous report [8], the use of several different drugs in combination has greatly improved remission and survival times in dogs with CLL.

The objective of this case report is to describe the clinicopathological findings, diagnosis, and the effectiveness of a combination chemotherapy in a dog with CLL.

Case Report

An 11-year-old, 3.3 kg, male Maltese dog was referred to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital of Konkuk University due to bloody and watery diarrhea, severe anemia, lethargy, and poor appetite.

Left submandibular lymph node enlargement, pale mucous membrane, and senile cataract were observed on physical examination. Profiles of an initial hematologic examination revealed nonregenerative anemia (2.99×10^6/µl; reference range, 5.5 to 8.5×10^6/µl) and marked lymphocytosis (47.77×10^3/µl; reference range, 1.0 to 4.8×10^3/µl) resulting in leukocytosis (72.08×10^3/µl; reference range, 6.0 to 17.0×10^3/µl). On differential counting of blood film marked lymphocytosis (98 per cent) was evident. Most of the cells in the peripheral blood were small to medium-sized.
lymphocytes with normal morphology (Fig. 1). Serum chemistry profiles showed increased hepatic enzymes, hyperphosphatemia, and hypoalbuminemia. Results of serum protein electrophoresis exhibited hyperglobulinemia (4.9 g/dl), resulting from alpha-2 fraction. Radiographic examinations revealed cardiomegaly on thoracic radiographs and hepatosplenomegaly was noted on abdominal radiographs. On ultrasonographic findings, dilated hepatic vein and mild ascites were noted. Abnormalities in urinalysis included bilirubinuria and proteinuria.

Presumptive diagnosis was made as a CLL based on physical examination, clinical signs, hematological and serum chemical profiles, radiographic and ultrasonographic findings.

Chemotherapy was applied with COP (Cyclophosphamide, vincristine, prednisone) protocol; administration of cyclophosphamide (300 mg/m², IV once every 2 week), vincristine (0.75 mg/m², IV once every 2 weeks, alternating weeks with the cyclophosphamide) and plus prednisone (50 mg/m², PO sid for a week, then 20 mg/m², PO every other day).

After first chemotherapy, the number of white blood cells was decreased to normal limit (17.40×10⁹/µl; reference range, 6.0 to 17.0×10⁹/µl) (Fig. 2). The patient survived 24 more days with chemotherapy. Blood transfusion (DEA 1 negative donor) was performed for the correction of severe anemia in this case as a supportive care.

Although bone marrow biopsy was essential for definitive diagnosis of CLL, it was denied from the owner of the patient. This is the limitation of this case report.

The response to chemotherapy was partially present and this case was survived more than 24 days. This study first demonstrates clinicopathological findings and chemotherapeutic response of chronic lymphocytic leukemia in South Korea.

Discussion

Lymphomas are solid tumors of neoplastic lymphocytes that develop outside the bone marrow. However, leukemia is defined as a neoplastic proliferation of hematopoietic cells originating within the bone marrow. In the dog, as in man, CLL is disease of middle- and old-age. This patient was an old-aged dog which is consistent with a previous report [8]. Generally in CLL, on routine hematometry, nonregenerative anemia is observed. In addition, lymphocytosis and bone marrow infiltration by small and mature lymphocytes confirm the diagnosis in CLL. The patient evaluated in this study showed the same hematological profiles described previously. Anemia in dog with CLL might be a poor prognostic sign, necessitating more supportive care with transfusions. In addition, anemia and thrombocytopenia, often life-threatening, can be counteracted with fresh blood transfusions. Supportive care during induction therapy in dogs with lymphocytic leukemia is essential.