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World J Gastrointest Surg 2024 October 27; 16(10): 3074-3380



EDITORIAL

- 3074 Changes over time in treatment for obstructive jaundice
Aoki H
- 3078 Single incision laparoscopic surgery for hepatocellular carcinoma
Karabacak I, Yildirim K, Gursel MF, Malazgirt Z
- 3084 Impact of liver metastasis on immunotherapy in gastric carcinoma
Chalkoo M, Bhat MY, Wani YH
- 3087 Urgent need for prognostic markers for hepatocellular carcinoma in the light of genomic instability and non-coding RNA signatures
Velikova T, Gulinac M
- 3091 Advancing perioperative optimization in Crohn's disease surgery with machine learning predictions
Nardone OM, Castiglione F, Maurea S
- 3094 Exploring the landscape of minimally invasive pancreatic surgery: Progress, challenges, and future directions
Donisi G, Zerbi A

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Case Control Study

- 3104 Three-dimensional printing for preoperative rehearsal and intraoperative navigation during laparoscopic rectal cancer surgery with left colic artery preservation
Zhao ZX, Hu ZJ, Yao RD, Su XY, Zhu S, Sun J, Yao Y

Retrospective Cohort Study

- 3114 Local excision of early rectal cancer: A multi-centre experience of transanal endoscopic microsurgery from the United Kingdom
Farid A, Tutton M, Thambi P, Gill T, Khan J
- 3123 Clinical significance of peri-appendiceal abscess and phlegmon in acute complicated appendicitis patients undergoing emergency appendectomy
Min LQ, Lu J, He HY
- 3133 Development of a novel difficulty scoring system for laparoscopic liver resection procedure in patients with intrahepatic duct stones
Luo B, Wu SK, Zhang K, Wang PH, Chen WW, Fu N, Yang ZM, Hao JC

Retrospective Study

- 3142** Serum nutritional predictive biomarkers and risk assessment for anastomotic leakage after laparoscopic surgery in rectal cancer patients
Shayimu P, Awula M, Wang CY, Jiapaer R, Pan YP, Wu ZM, Chen Y, Zhao ZL
- 3155** Impact of fast-track surgery on perioperative care in patients undergoing hepatobiliary surgery
Wang XH, Chen FF, Pan J, Jiang YF, Yao MY, Mao JL, Xu YF
- 3163** Follow-up strategy for early detection of delayed pseudoaneurysms in patients with blunt traumatic spleen injury: A single-center retrospective study
Cho SH, Kim GW, Hwang S, Lim KH
- 3171** Adjuvant chemotherapy for isolated resectable colorectal lung metastasis: A retrospective study using inverse probability treatment weighting propensity analysis
Gao Z, Wu SK, Zhang SJ, Wang X, Wu YC, Jin X
- 3185** Recurrence scoring system predicting early recurrence for patients with pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma undergoing pancreatectomy and portomesenteric vein resection
He H, Zou CF, Jiang YJ, Yang F, Di Y, Li J, Jin C, Fu DL
- 3202** Effects of postoperative treatment with chemotherapy and cellular immunotherapy on patients with colorectal cancer
Ding ZY, Piao Y, Jiang T, Chen J, Wang YN, Yu HY, Zheng ZD
- 3211** Postoperative serum tumor markers-based nomogram predicting early recurrence for patients undergoing radical resections of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma
He H, Zou CF, Yang F, Di Y, Jin C, Fu DL
- 3224** Comparison of efficacy and safety of nab-paclitaxel and oxaliplatin + S-1 and standard S-1 and oxaliplatin chemotherapy regimens for treatment of gastric cancer
Wang YC, Feng L, Wang GP, Yu PJ, Guo C, Cai BJ, Song Y, Pan T, Lin BH, Li YD, Xiao JJ
- 3239** Risk factors and survival prediction model establishment for prognosis in patients with radical resection of gallbladder cancer
Li XF, Ma TT, Li T

Observational Study

- 3253** Surgical and non-surgical risk factors affecting the insufficiency of ileocolic anastomosis after first-time surgery in Crohn's disease patients
Cwaliński J, Lorek F, Mazurkiewicz Ł, Mazurkiewicz M, Lizurej W, Paszkowski J, Cholerzyńska H, Zasada W
- 3261** Relationship between intracranial pressure and neurocognitive function among older adults after radical resection of rectal cancer
Song B, Li LP, Wang XL, Guo Y, Li J

Prospective Study

- 3269** Prevention and management of postoperative deep vein thrombosis in lower extremities of patients with gastrointestinal tumor
Shu L, Xia CW, Pang YF

Randomized Controlled Trial

- 3277** Clinical evaluation of sintilimab in conjunction with bevacizumab for advanced colorectal cancer with microsatellite stable-type after failure of first-line therapy
Wang L, Diao YZ, Ma XF, Luo YS, Guo QJ, Chen XQ

Clinical and Translational Research

- 3288** Structured magnetic resonance imaging and endoanal ultrasound anal fistulas reporting template (SMART): An interdisciplinary Delphi consensus
Sudol-Szopińska I, Garg P, Mellgren A, Spinelli A, Breukink S, Iacobellis F, Kołodziejczak M, Ciesielski P, Jenssen C, SMART Collaborative Group, Santoro GA

CASE REPORT

- 3301** Formation and rupture of liver hematomas caused by intrahepatic gallbladder perforation: A case report and review of literature
Huang HW, Wang H, Leng C, Mei B
- 3312** Reassessment of palliative surgery in conversion therapy of previously unresectable hepatocellular carcinoma: Two case reports and review of literature
Zhu YB, Qin JY, Zhang TT, Zhang WJ, Ling Q
- 3321** Lung cancer metastasis-induced distal esophageal segmental spasm confirmed by individualized peroral endoscopic myotomy: A case report
Shi H, Chen SY, Xie ZF, Lin LL, Jiang Y
- 3328** Modified technical protocol for single-port laparoscopic appendectomy using needle-type grasping forceps for acute simple appendicitis: A case report
Chen Y, Fan ZQ, Fu XA, Zhang XX, Yuan JQ, Guo SG
- 3334** Massive simultaneous hepatic and renal perivascular epithelioid cell tumor benefitted from surgery and everolimus treatment: A case report
Yang HT, Wang FR, He N, She YH, Du YY, Shi WG, Yang J, Chen G, Zhang SZ, Cui F, Long B, Yu ZY, Zhu JM, Zhang GY
- 3343** Leukopenia-a rare complication secondary to invasive liver abscess syndrome in a patient with diabetes mellitus: A case report
Niu CY, Yao BT, Tao HY, Peng XG, Zhang QH, Chen Y, Liu L
- 3350** Acute gastric volvulus combined with pneumatosis coli rupture misdiagnosed as gastric volvulus with perforation: A case report
Zhang Q, Xu XJ, Ma J, Huang HY, Zhang YM

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- 3358** Can serious postoperative complications in patients with Crohn's disease be predicted using machine learning?
Zbar AP
- 3363** Influencing factors and preventive measures of infectious complications after intestinal resection for Crohn's disease
Lv SR, Huang X, Zhou LY, Shi J, Gong CC, Wang MK, Yang JS
- 3371** Evaluation of preoperative blood markers for predicting intra-abdominal infection during colorectal cancer resection: A commentary on recent findings
Zhang SY, Chen J, Cai N
- 3374** Differential diagnosis of gastric submucosal masses and external pressure lesions
Na Y, Liu XD, Xu HM
- 3377** Contributing to the prediction of prognosis for treated hepatocellular carcinoma: Imaging aspects that sculpt the future
Lindner C

ABOUT COVER

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The primary aim of *World Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery* (WJGS, *World J Gastrointest Surg*) is to provide scholars and readers from various fields of gastrointestinal surgery with a platform to publish high-quality basic and clinical research articles and communicate their research findings online.

WJGS mainly publishes articles reporting research results and findings obtained in the field of gastrointestinal surgery and covering a wide range of topics including biliary tract surgical procedures, biliopancreatic diversion, colectomy, esophagectomy, esophagostomy, pancreas transplantation, and pancreatectomy, *etc.*

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Leukopenia-a rare complication secondary to invasive liver abscess syndrome in a patient with diabetes mellitus: A case report

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

Thrombocytopenia is a common complication of invasive liver abscess syndrome (ILAS) by *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (*K. pneumoniae*) infection, which indicates severe infection and a poor prognosis. However, the presence of leukopenia is rare. There are rare reports on leukopenia and its clinical significance for ILAS, and there is currently no recognized treatment plan. Early and broad-spectrum antimicrobial therapy may be an effective therapy for treating ILAS and improving its prognosis.

CASE SUMMARY

A 55-year-old male patient who developed fever, chills, and abdominal distension without an obvious cause presented to the hospital for treatment. Laboratory tests revealed thrombocytopenia, leukopenia, and multiple organ dysfunction. Imaging examinations revealed an abscess in the right lobe of the liver and thrombophlebitis, and *K. pneumoniae* was detected in the blood cultures. Since the patient was diabetic and had multi-system involvement, he was diagnosed with ILAS accompanied by leukopenia and thrombocytopenia. After antibiotic treatment and systemic supportive therapy, the symptoms disappeared, and the patient's condition

almost completely resolved.

CONCLUSION

Leukopenia is a rare complication of ILAS, which serves as an indicator of adverse prognostic outcomes and the severity of infection.

Key Words: Invasive liver abscess syndrome; *Klebsiella pneumoniae*; Leukopenia; Thrombocytopenia; Treatment; Prognosis; Case report

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Core Tip: Thrombocytopenia is a common complication of invasive liver abscess syndrome (ILAS). However, there have been no reports of concurrent leukopenia with ILAS so far. This patient presented with a sustained high fever, abdominal distension, and pain after hospitalization. He subsequently developed multiple organ and system dysfunction, as well as an atypical leukopenia coexisting with thrombocytopenia. These features are often used as indicators of the severity of the disease. *Klebsiella pneumoniae* was detected on blood cultures, and antibiotics were adjusted timely based on drug sensitivity test results. After systemic support and blood glucose management treatment, the patient's condition resolved. Early antimicrobial therapy is an effective measure to control infection and improve prognosis.

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INTRODUCTION

Invasive liver abscess syndrome (ILAS) comprises a liver abscess caused by hypervirulent *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (hvKp) and metastatic infections in multiple extrahepatic organs such as the brain, lungs, and eyes. ILAS is a severe clinical condition with a global mortality rate of approximately 2%-19%[1]. Clinical symptoms include fever and chills, abdominal pain, and abdominal distension; however, metastatic infections can manifest as meningitis, brain abscesses, lung abscesses, endophthalmitis, and pneumonia[2,3]. The incidence of ILAS has increased significantly over the past two decades in southeast Asian countries[4]. Risk factors for ILAS include male sex, diabetes, and immunosuppressive conditions, such as malignancies[5]. However, early detection and appropriate treatment of ILAS remain challenging.

Intestinal hvKp, which is the main pathogen implicated in ILAS, invades the liver by passing through the intestinal barrier or *via* retrograde entry into the liver. It then enters the portal vein circulation[3], leading to bacteraemia and sepsis. Haematological findings of ILAS typically include an elevated white blood cell (WBC) count and decreased platelet count [6]. To the best of our knowledge, ILAS with concurrent leukopenia has not yet been reported.

CASE PRESENTATION

Chief complaints

Fever accompanied by abdominal distension for 3 days.

History of present illness

A 55-year-old man with a 3-day history of fever and abdominal distension was admitted to our hospital (No. 698690). He also experienced chills, headaches, and abdominal pain. He denied any history of systemic and ocular diseases. On admission, his fever was remittent and fluctuated between 37.5 °C and 40.5 °C. Conjunctival congestion and tenderness in the epigastrium and right upper quadrant were also detected.

History of past illness

He was previously healthy.

Personal and family history

Previously healthy with no history of special illnesses.

Physical examination

Temperature 37.7 °C, pulse 113 times/minute, respiratory rate 18 times/minute, blood pressure 107/74 mmHg, height

170 cm, weight 70 Kg. The patient was alert, awake, and oriented, with no signs of an altered level of consciousness. He had palpable enlargement of the superficial lymph nodes and coarse respiratory sounds in both lungs. His heart rate was 113 beats *per* minute, the rhythm was regular, no murmurs were heard on auscultation of the heart, the abdomen was flat and soft, mild tenderness was found in the upper and middle upper abdomen, there was no rebound pain or pain upon percussion of the liver area, and auscultation of bowel sounds revealed four bowel sounds *per* minute.

Laboratory examinations

Blood routine and inflammatory markers: Laboratory tests revealed significantly increased high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, interleukin-6, and procalcitonin levels, as well as reduced platelet counts of $70 \times 10^9/\text{L}$ (reference range: $100 \times 10^9/\text{L}$ to $300 \times 10^9/\text{L}$) and WBC counts of $3.76 \times 10^9/\text{L}$ (reference range: $4 \times 10^9/\text{L}$ to $10 \times 10^9/\text{L}$) (Table 1).

Urinalysis: Urine specific gravity 1.04 (1.003-1.030), urine protein ++, glucose \pm , albumin 150 mg/L (0.0-23.8), urine protein/creatinine 0.15 (0.000-0.030).

Blood biochemistry testing: The fasting blood glucose, postprandial glucose, and HbA1c levels were 8.2 mmol/L, 13.8 mmol/L, and 6.2%, respectively. Additional laboratory test results revealed liver and kidney dysfunction, electrolyte imbalances, and an abnormal coagulation profile. The respective detection result values were as follows: Total bilirubin (TBIL) 45.6 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (3.4-20.5), direct bilirubin 20.8 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (0.0-6.8), alanine aminotransferase 57.2 U/L (0-40), aspartate transaminase 48.4 U/L (0-40), gamma glutamyl transpeptidase 247 U/L (8.0-58.0), creatinine 114.7 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (58.3-106.0), sodium (Na^+) 132.8 mmol/L (136.0-146.0), chloridion (Cl^-) 93.3 mmol/L (101.0-109.0), phosphorus 0.59 mmol/L (0.81-1.45), fibrinogen 5 g/L (2.0-4.0), antithrombin III 80.9% (80.0-120.0), D-dimer 3.67 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ (0-0.55), and fibrinogen degradation products 12.3 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ (0-5.0). These abnormal results indicate that multiple organ functions have been injured. Infectious disease screening yielded negative results for respiratory pathogen immunoglobulin M, hepatitis virus, anti-human immunodeficiency virus, anti-tuberculosis antibodies, and haemorrhagic fever virus antibodies. Blood cultures detected *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (*K. pneumoniae*).

Imaging examinations

Chest and abdominal computed tomography (plain scan + enhancement) revealed two pneumonia cases, bilateral pleural effusions, small intestinal fluid accumulation in the lower abdomen with slight dilation of the intestinal tract, and a possible abscess in the right lobe of the liver (Figure 1A-C).

Upper abdominal magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography revealed a right lobe liver abscess, adjacent suppurative cholangitis, and bilateral pleural effusions accompanied by incomplete compression and expansion of adjacent lung tissue (Figure 1D).

MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXPERT CONSULTATION

Experts participating in the multidisciplinary consultation came from the following departments: Imaging Department, Respiratory Department, infectious diseases Department, Interventional Department, Laboratory Department and General Surgery Department.

FINAL DIAGNOSIS

Based on these findings, the patient was diagnosed with hvKp caused ILAS secondary to diabetes mellitus and leucopenia through multidisciplinary expert consultation.

TREATMENT

After the patient was admitted, he received the immediate empirical antibiotic piperacillin-tazobactam (4.5 g every 8 hours), intensive blood glucose control, and supportive treatment. On day 3 of admission, his condition worsened, and the WBC and platelet counts further decreased to $2.50 \times 10^9/\text{L}$ and $65 \times 10^9/\text{L}$, respectively. After pathogen culture combined with drug sensitivity testing, the antibiotics were switched to meropenem (1 g every 8 hours) to which the *K. pneumoniae* was sensitive, which resulted in normalisation of the WBC and platelet counts by day 5 and day 8, respectively. The fever also resolved by day 13. After strict dietary and blood glucose management, his fasting blood glucose and HbA1c levels were 6.2 mmol/L and 6.1%, respectively by day 13. The follow-up blood culture performed on day 17 yielded negative results.

OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP

After 2 weeks of comprehensive treatment, the patient did not experience any further fever, his symptoms improved, and all examination findings had improved. At the 56-day follow-up, the patient did not experience any discomfort, and

Table 1 Blood routine and inflammatory markers						
Date	WBC (4×10^9 - 10×10^9 /L)	N% (50%-70%)	PLT (100×10^9 - 300×10^9 /L)	HrCRP (0-10 mg/L)	IL-6 (< 7 pg/mL)	PCT-GN (< 0.5 ng/mL)
March, 04 2024	3.76	87.8	80	145.76	331.51	15.806
March, 06 2024	2.5	74	70	61.77	24.47	5.402
March, 09 2024	7.25	81.2	71	27.98	16.08	3.563
March, 12 2024	6.76	74.1	302	11.81	7.07	0.484
March, 15 2024	5.55	80.5	219	50.36	36.22	1.176
March, 18 2024	5.86	75	259	31.52	8.01	0.85
April, 29 2024	4.21	32.2	194	0.68	< 1	< 0.02

WBC: White blood cell; N: Neutrophil; PLT: Platelet; HrCRP: Hypersensitivity C-reactive protein; IL-6: Interleukin-6; PCT-GN: Procalcitonin.

physical examination revealed no obvious abnormalities. All laboratory tests were normal, including fasting blood glucose (5.6 mmol/L) and HbA1c (5.9%). Imaging results revealed complete resolution of thrombophlebitis and granulomatous changes following the liver abscess (Figure 1E and F). Thus, we concluded that we had successfully treated this patient, and he had a good prognosis.

DISCUSSION

Poor glycaemic control damages neutrophil phagocytic function and promotes the growth of pathogens in tissues, ultimately leading to systemic inflammatory response syndrome and multiorgan injury following hvKp infection. Laboratory test and imaging examination results of this patient indicated bacteraemia, conjunctivitis, pneumonia with pleural effusions, small intestinal fluid accumulation with dilatation, and multiorgan dysfunction. Uncommon findings included hepatic thrombophlebitis in the right liver lobe and leukopenia, which confirmed the diagnosis of severe ILAS. The above clinical manifestations and laboratory tests indicate that *K. pneumoniae* is a highly invasive bacterium that may lead to systemic dissemination and severe inflammation.

Thrombophlebitis and liver abscesses are distinctive imaging features of ILAS. Potential mechanisms include hvKp endotoxin-induced hypercoagulability and blood flow stasis from venous drainage of the abscess, direct inflammation-induced thrombosis, and coagulopathy with an elevated D-dimer level[7,8]. Thrombophlebitis is a marker of haematogenous dissemination that involves multiple organs and increases clinical complexity and mortality risk.

The haematological findings of ILAS include leucocytosis and thrombocytopenia[9]. Thrombocytopenia is associated with infection and exacerbated severity[8] and is an independent risk factor for invasive syndromes in patients with thrombophlebitis, *K. pneumoniae* infection, and liver abscesses[8-10]. Platelets are considered an extension of the cellular immune system. In an inflammatory environment, platelets are activated and release multiple different factors, including many pro-inflammatory factors. The activation of this inflammatory function leads to thrombosis, which may worsen inflammatory diseases[11]. Patients with ILAS and thrombocytopenia have impaired myeloid platelet production. Additionally, platelet activation-related thrombosis promotes platelet consumption[9].

Our patient experienced 4 days of leukopenia, which has not been previously reported in the literature. The following possible mechanisms were suggested for the patient's prolonged leukopenia: Severe gram-negative *K. pneumoniae* infection causing leukocyte consumption; inflammatory and pro-inflammatory factors leading to immune-mediated leukocyte destruction; Bacterial toxins and metabolic by-products that impair bone marrow granulocyte production; And compromised immune function in patients with diabetes[12]. Leukopenia and thrombocytopenia in ILAS are indicators of severe infection and poor prognosis. There is currently no report on diabetes accompanied by leukopenia. We consider that it may be related to the low immune mechanisms of diabetes, increased consumption after infection, and suppressed hematopoietic function of the bone marrow.

Compared with the general population, individuals with diabetes are more prone to infection, the infection process is more complex, and the infection is more likely to become severe[13]. The main mechanisms causing this result include: (1) High blood glucose causing inhibition of immune cell activity [such as cluster of differentiation (CD) 4, CD8, and natural killer cells] and cytokine production, leading to immune dysfunction; (2) High blood glucose causing inhibition of the adhesion, chemotaxis, and phagocytic function of neutrophils and WBCs, and damage to the antioxidant system involved in bactericidal activity ultimately, leading to an infection that is difficult to control; and (3) Elevated blood glucose leads to peripheral vascular disease, increased permeability of the vascular wall, and decreased blood oxygen

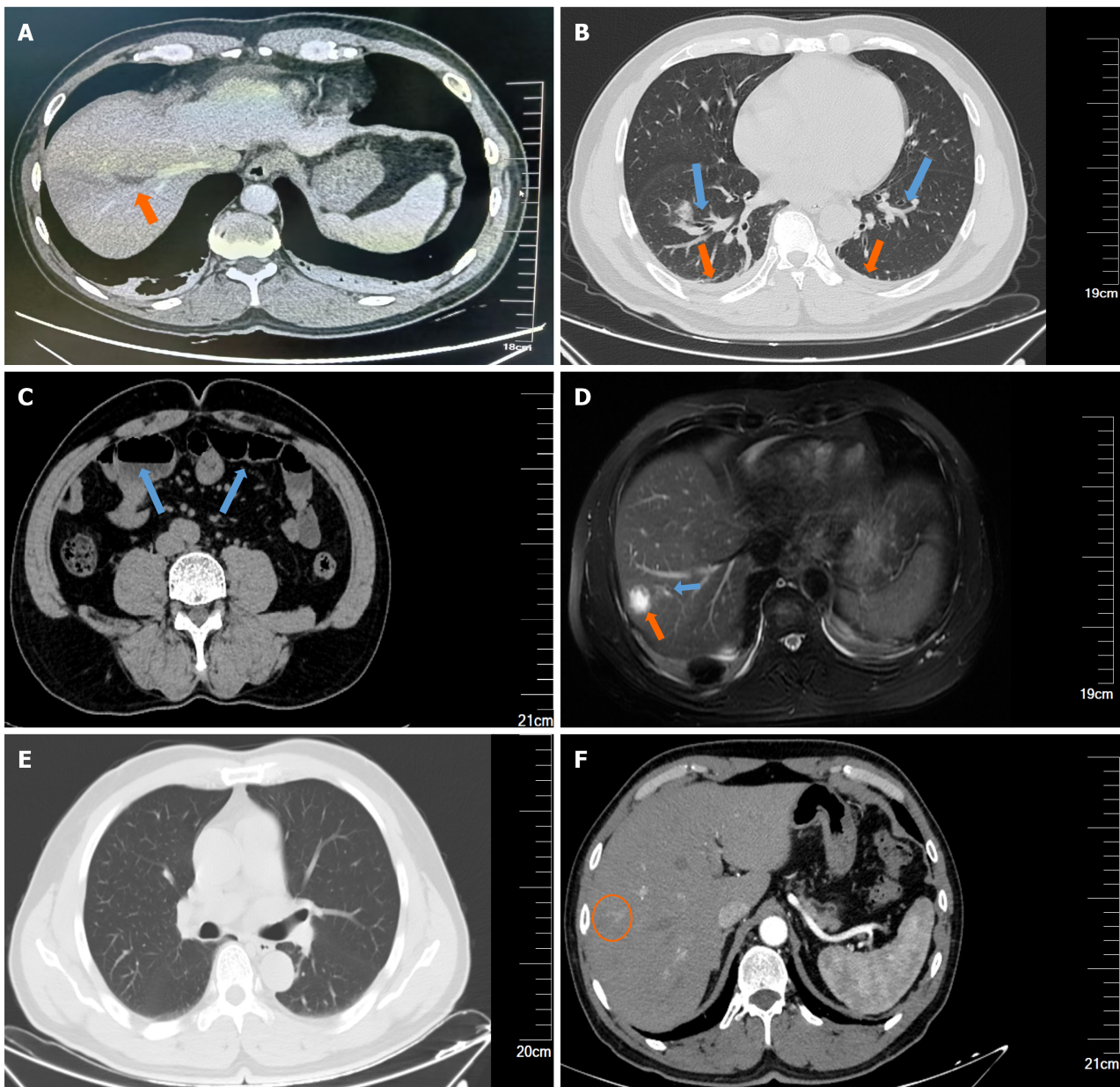


Figure 1 Imaging examination results of the patient. A: Hepatic enhanced computed tomography (CT) showed hepatic thrombophlebitis in the right liver lobe (orange arrow: Filling defect in the vein with irregular wall thickness); B: Abdominal CT showed bilateral lung inflammation (blue arrow) and bilateral pleural effusion (orange arrow); C: Intestinal CT showed fluid accumulation in the small intestine and bowel dilatation (blue arrow). During a 56-day follow-up; D: Magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography showed a right liver lobe abscess and purulent cholangitis (orange arrow: 20 mm × 16 mm liver abscess; blue arrow: Purulent cholangitis with thickened duct walls); E: Abdominal CT showed absorbed pneumonia and pleural effusion; F: Hepatic enhanced CT revealed low-density nodule (approximately 6 mm) in the upper segment of the right lobe (S8) indicating granulomatous changes after liver abscess treatment (orange circle) and complete resolution of the hepatic vein thrombus.

content in the surrounding tissues. These factors provide favorable conditions for the growth and proliferation of bacteria. Therefore, individuals with diabetes who are infected with *K. pneumoniae* are more prone to hematogenous dissemination, which leads to multiple organ involvement and abscess formation[14]. Because this patient was diagnosed as diabetes for the first time and his blood glucose level was not very high, he had no obvious clinical manifestations of diabetes and related complications. This may be a beneficial factor for his good prognosis.

In terms of immunity, the function of polymorphonuclear leukocytes is inhibited, and the adhesion, chemotaxis, and phagocytosis of WBCs are reduced. Additionally, with a background of diabetes and metabolic disorders, the persistent low-grade inflammation, the imbalance in gut microbiota, and the impairment of intestinal barrier function may increase the risk of bacteria entering the blood from the intestinal tract[13].

There are no specific guidelines or consensus to address ILAS treatment. Antibiotic therapy is the primary treatment for most ILAS cases[10]. After diagnosis and detection of infection metastasis, early identification of the pathogen, selection of antibiotics to which the organism is susceptible[15], and a comprehensive evaluation of extrahepatic abscesses are crucial. Untreated or delayed cases result in a poor prognosis.

Whether anticoagulation therapy is necessary for ILAS with thrombophlebitis is unclear. Molton *et al*[16] suggested that reperfusion of the affected veins is closely related to the complete resolution of abscesses, and anti-inflammatory drugs can spontaneously resolve most purulent hepatic venous thrombosis cases. Anticoagulant therapy was not administered to our patient because he had thrombosis, mild abnormalities in the coagulation function, thrombocytopenia, and bacteraemia. Thus, anticoagulant therapy would have had more disadvantages than benefits in this case. Moreover, thrombophlebitis improved gradually after active anti-inflammatory treatment alone. Because the patient was recovering well, he refused to undergo a liver abscess puncture to allow for further evaluation of the pathogenic bacteria, bacterial typing, and identification of the virulence gene.

CONCLUSION

ILAS involves an acute onset and rapid progression with a nonspecific clinical presentation and presents diagnostic and therapeutic challenges. These factors suggest a poor prognosis if treatment is not promptly initiated. Thrombocytopenia has been confirmed to be a poor prognostic predictor for ILAS, however, not only the existence of leukopenia but also the coexistence of leukopenia with thrombocytopenia in ILAS is extremely rare. In this case, the patient presented with both leukopenia and thrombocytopenia, which portend an evolution toward a more critical condition. However, we were able to promptly diagnose and successfully cure the patient in this case. Therefore, we considered leukopenia as another poor prognostic predictor apart from thrombocytopenia in ILAS. Early pathogen identification, precise anti-infective treatment, and multiorgan function protection are critical to controlling ILAS and improving clinical outcomes.

FOOTNOTES

Author contributions: Niu CY and Yao BT conceived the designing, acquiring and analyzing data and wrote the manuscript; Tao HY collected the data; Peng XG and Zhang QH analyzed the imaging and contributed to diagnosis; Chen Y and Liu L established the diagnosis and reviewed the manuscript; All authors read and approved the final manuscript; Niu CY and Yao BT contributed equally.

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