

World Journal of *Gastrointestinal Surgery*

World J Gastrointest Surg 2024 June 27; 16(6): 1485-1955



EDITORIAL

- 1485 Has the open surgical approach in colorectal cancer really become uncommon?
Cariati M, Brisinda G, Chiarello MM
- 1493 Intestinal Behçet's disease: A review of clinical diagnosis and treatment
Liu Y, Gao F, Yang DQ, Jiao Y
- 1501 Non-operative management of rectal cancer: Highlighting the controversies
Emile SH, Wignakumar A
- 1507 Current considerations for the surgical management of gallbladder adenomas
Pavlidis ET, Galanis IN, Pavlidis TE
- 1513 Immunotherapy in gastric cancer with liver metastasis: Challenges and opportunities
Bardakçi M, Ergun Y
- 1517 From the mathematical model to the patient: The scientific and human aspects of artificial intelligence in gastrointestinal surgery
Arredondo Montero J

MINIREVIEWS

- 1521 Laparoscopic right radical hemicolectomy: Central vascular ligation and complete mesocolon excision *vs* D3 lymphadenectomy - How I do it?
Yadav K

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Case Control Study**

- 1527 Perioperative outcomes of transvaginal specimen extraction laparoscopic total gastrectomy and conventional laparoscopic-assisted total gastrectomy
Zhang ZC, Wang WS, Chen JH, Ma YH, Luo QF, Li YB, Yang Y, Ma D

Retrospective Cohort Study

- 1537 Optimal extent of lymphadenectomy improves prognosis and guides adjuvant chemotherapy in esophageal cancer: A propensity score-matched analysis
Tang JM, Huang SJ, Chen QB, Wu HS, Qiao GB
- 1548 Efficacy of laparoscopic low anterior resection for colorectal cancer patients with 3D-vascular reconstruction for left coronary artery preservation
Wang Y, Liu ZS, Wang ZB, Liu S, Sun FB

- 1558** Robotic-assisted low anterior resection for rectal cancer shows similar clinical efficacy to laparoscopic surgery: A propensity score matched study
Long SX, Wang XN, Tian SB, Bi YF, Gao SS, Wang Y, Guo XB
- 1571** Machine learning prediction model for gray-level co-occurrence matrix features of synchronous liver metastasis in colorectal cancer
Yang KF, Li SJ, Xu J, Zheng YB
- 1582** Risk factors associated with intraoperative persistent hypotension in pancreaticoduodenectomy
Wang XJ, Xuan XC, Sun ZC, Shen S, Yu F, Li NN, Chu XC, Yin H, Hu YL
- Retrospective Study**
- 1592** Endoscopic ultrasound-guided biliary drainage *vs* percutaneous transhepatic bile duct drainage in the management of malignant obstructive jaundice
Zhu QQ, Chen BF, Yang Y, Zuo XY, Liu WH, Wang TT, Zhang Y
- 1601** Clinical efficacy of Gamma Knife® combined with transarterial chemoembolization and immunotherapy in the treatment of primary liver cancer
Wang GF, Shu CX, Cai XD, Wang HB, Xu JH, Jia YQ
- 1609** Identifying the risk factors for pancreatic fistula after laparoscopic pancreaticoduodenectomy in patients with pancreatic cancer
Xu H, Meng QC, Hua J, Wang W
- 1618** Correlation between postoperative chemotherapy regimen and survival in patients with resectable gastric adenocarcinoma accompanied with vascular cancer thrombus
Yang ZF, Dong ZX, Dai CJ, Fu LZ, Yu HM, Wang YS
- 1629** Gastroesophageal signet ring cell carcinoma morbidity and mortality: A retrospective review
Grinlinton M, Ferkert C, Maurice A, Angelo N, Booth M
- 1637** Analysis of lymph node metastasis and survival prognosis in early gastric cancer patients: A retrospective study
Liu DY, Hu JJ, Zhou YQ, Tan AR
- 1647** Clinical study of neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio and platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio in hypertriglyceridemia-induced acute pancreatitis and acute biliary pancreatitis with persistent organ failure
Xu MS, Xu JL, Gao X, Mo SJ, Xing JY, Liu JH, Tian YZ, Fu XF
- 1660** Tumor recurrence and survival prognosis in patients with advanced gastric cancer after radical resection with radiotherapy and chemotherapy
Nie SF, Wang CY, Li L, Yang C, Zhu ZM, Fei JD
- 1670** Prediction and analysis of albumin-bilirubin score combined with liver function index and carcinoembryonic antigen on liver metastasis of colorectal cancer
Wang ZM, Pan SP, Zhang JJ, Zhou J

- 1681** Comparative analysis of the short and medium-term efficacy of the Da Vinci robot *versus* laparoscopic total mesangectomy for rectal cancer
Gao WG, Shi W, Gong XC, Li ZW, Tuoheti Y
- 1691** How to apply *ex-vivo* split liver transplantation safely and feasibly: A three-step approach
Zhao D, Xie QH, Fang TS, Zhang KJ, Tang JX, Yan X, Jin X, Xie LJ, Xie WG
- 1700** Clinical efficacy of laparoscopic cholecystectomy combined with endoscopic papillary balloon dilation in treatment of gallbladder stones with common bile duct stones: A retrospective study
Liu HD, Zhang Q, Xu WS, Jin S
- 1709** Evaluation of oxaliplatin and tiglo combination therapy in locally advanced gastric cancer
Wang T, Zhang LY
- 1717** Lung ultrasound score evaluation of the effect of pressure-controlled ventilation volume-guaranteed on patients undergoing laparoscopic-assisted radical gastrectomy
Tan J, Bao CM, Chen XY
- 1726** Effect of endoscopic sphincterotomy and endoscopic papillary balloon dilation endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatographies on the sphincter of Oddi
Fu K, Yang YY, Chen H, Zhang GX, Wang Y, Yin Z
- 1734** Influence of reduced-port laparoscopic surgery on perioperative indicators, postoperative recovery, and serum inflammation in patients with colorectal carcinoma
Wu HB, Liu DF, Liu YL, Wang XF, Cao YP
- Clinical Trials Study**
- 1742** Clinical effect of spleen aminopeptide on improving liver function damage and immune function in children with infant hepatitis syndrome
Fang XQ, Gan T, Wang LM
- Observational Study**
- 1749** Observation of therapeutic effect of lamp irradiation combined with purple gromwell oil gauze on alleviating intestinal colic in patients
Cen BZ, Chen YS, Li LP, Wu JW, Xie YF
- Randomized Controlled Trial**
- 1756** Radiofrequency ablation combined with transcatheter arterial chemoembolization for recurrent liver cancer
Guo JY, Zhao LL, Cai HJ, Zeng H, Mei WD
- Randomized Clinical Trial**
- 1765** Effect of high-protein peptide-based formula compared with isocaloric isonitrogenous polymeric formula in critically ill surgical patient
Sumritpradit P, Shantavasinkul PC, Ungpinitpong W, Noorit P, Gajaseni C

Clinical and Translational Research

- 1775 Metabolic disorders and hepatitis: Insights from a Mendelian randomization study
Liang LB, Liu XP, Mao TR, Su QL
- 1791 Analysis of cancer-specific survival in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer: A evidence-based medicine study
Zhou YJ, Tan ZE, Zhuang WD, Xu XH
- 1803 FDX1 as a novel biomarker and treatment target for stomach adenocarcinoma
Xie XZ, Zuo L, Huang W, Fan QM, Weng YY, Yao WD, Jiang JL, Jin JQ

Basic Study

- 1825 Peritoneal fluid indocyanine green test for diagnosis of gut leakage in anastomotic leakage rats and colorectal surgery patients
Huang Y, Li TY, Weng JF, Liu H, Xu YJ, Zhang S, Gu WL

SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

- 1835 Global geoeidemiology of gastrointestinal surgery rates in Crohn's disease
Weissman S, Aziz M, Bangolo A, Nagesh VK, Aung H, Mathew M, Garcia L, Chandar SA, Karamthoti P, Bawa H, Alshimari A, Kejela Y, Mehdi N, Joseph CA, Kodali A, Kumar R, Goyal P, Sathesha S, Nivedita F, Tesoro N, Sethi T, Singh G, Belal A, Intisar A, Khalid H, Cornwell S, Suresh SB, Ahmed K, Marole KK, Anand OP, Reshi RB, Mehta TI, Elias S, Feuerstein JD

META-ANALYSIS

- 1845 Compare clinical efficacy and safety of neoadjuvant therapy and neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy for locally advanced rectal cancer: Meta-analysis
Wang Y, Yang Y, Liu QQ, Wang SZ
- 1857 Sarcopenia adversely impacts clinical outcomes in patients undergoing pancreaticoduodenectomy: A systematic review and meta-analysis
Zhang QH, Ma JD, Lu YM, Zhang RN, Zhao ZH, Li YT, Chen QP
- 1871 Comparison efficacy and safety of total laparoscopic gastrectomy and laparoscopically assisted total gastrectomy in treatment of gastric cancer
Li L, Liu DY, Leng J, Tao XM, Wu HQ, Zhu YP
- 1883 Application value of indocyanine green fluorescence imaging in guiding sentinel lymph node biopsy diagnosis of gastric cancer: Meta-analysis
Zhang QJ, Cao ZC, Zhu Q, Sun Y, Li RD, Tong JL, Zheng Q

SCIENTOMETRICS

- 1894 Visualizing the landscape of appendiceal tumor research after 2010: A bibliometric study
Ji JN, Yin ZB

CASE REPORT

- 1910** No-touch isolation technique in emergency pancreaticoduodenectomy for neoplastic hemorrhage: Two case reports and review of literature
Cho A, Katagiri S, Ota M, Onizawa S, Higuchi R, Sugishita T, Niwa Y, Ishita T, Mouri T, Kato A, Iwata M
- 1918** Malignant myopericytoma originating from the colon: A case report
Zhang HL, Zhang M, Guo JQ, Wu FN, Zhu JD, Tu CY, Lv XL, Zhang K
- 1926** Novel magnetic compression technique for the treatment of postoperative anastomotic stenosis in rectal cancer: A case report
Zhang MM, Sha HC, Xue HR, Qin YF, Song XG, Li Y, Li Y, Deng ZW, Gao YL, Dong FF, Lyu Y, Yan XP
- 1933** Magnetic compression anastomosis to restore biliary tract continuity after obstruction following major abdominal trauma: A case report
Zhang MM, Tao J, Sha HC, Li Y, Song XG, Muensterer OJ, Dong FF, Zhang L, Lyu Y, Yan XP
- 1939** Colo-colonic intussusception as a rare complication of colonoscopy with polypectomy: Two case reports
Xiang SH, Xu GQ
- 1948** Resection of polyps involving the appendiceal orifice by combined endo-laparoscopic surgery: Two case reports
Zhang YY, Lu JY, Wang Q, Yang AM

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- 1953** Evaluating bacterial contamination and surgical site infection risks in intracorporeal anastomosis: Role of bowel preparation
Lee J

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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.*

INDEXING/ABSTRACTING

The *WJGS* is now abstracted and indexed in Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE, also known as SciSearch®), Current Contents/Clinical Medicine, Journal Citation Reports/Science Edition, PubMed, PubMed Central, Reference Citation Analysis, China Science and Technology Journal Database, and Superstar Journals Database. The 2024 Edition of Journal Citation Reports® cites the 2023 journal impact factor (JIF) for *WJGS* as 1.8; JIF without journal self cites: 1.7; 5-year JIF: 1.9; JIF Rank: 123/290 in surgery; JIF Quartile: Q2; and 5-year JIF Quartile: Q3.

RESPONSIBLE EDITORS FOR THIS ISSUE

Production Editor: Zi-Hang Xu, Production Department Director: Xiang Li, Cover Editor: Jia-Ru Fan.

NAME OF JOURNAL

World Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery

ISSN

ISSN 1948-9366 (online)

LAUNCH DATE

November 30, 2009

FREQUENCY

Monthly

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Peter Schemmer

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

<https://www.wjgnet.com/1948-9366/editorialboard.htm>

PUBLICATION DATE

June 27, 2024

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/gerinfo/204>

GUIDELINES FOR ETHICS DOCUMENTS

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GUIDELINES FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/gerinfo/240>

PUBLICATION ETHICS

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/GerInfo/288>

PUBLICATION MISCONDUCT

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/gerinfo/208>

ARTICLE PROCESSING CHARGE

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/gerinfo/242>

STEPS FOR SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS

<https://www.wjgnet.com/bpg/GerInfo/239>

ONLINE SUBMISSION

<https://www.f6publishing.com>



Current considerations for the surgical management of gallbladder adenomas

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Specialty type: Gastroenterology and hepatology

Provenance and peer review: Invited article; Externally peer reviewed.

Peer-review model: Single blind

Peer-review report's classification

Scientific Quality: Grade C

Novelty: Grade B

Creativity or Innovation: Grade B

Scientific Significance: Grade B

P-Reviewer: McFadden N, Canada

Received: February 23, 2024

Revised: April 29, 2024

Accepted: May 16, 2024

Published online: June 27, 2024

Processing time: 128 Days and 0.3 Hours



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Abstract

Gallbladder adenomas are rare lesions (0.5%) associated with potential malignant transformation, particularly with gallbladder adenomas that are ≥ 1 cm in size. Early detection and management are crucial for preventing lethal carcinoma development. These polyps can often be distinguished from the more often nonneoplastic cholesterol pseudopolyps (5%-10%), which are benign. Ultrasonography is the first-line tool for initial diagnosis and follow-up when indicated. The question is whether cholecystectomy is always necessary for all adenomas. The management of gallbladder adenomas is determined according to the size of the tumor, the growth rate of the tumor, the patient's symptoms and whether risk factors for malignancy are present. Adenomas ≥ 1 cm in size, an age > 50 years and a familial history of gallbladder carcinoma are indications for immediate laparoscopic cholecystectomy. Otherwise, ultrasound follow-up is indicated. For adenomas 6-9 mm in size, the absence of ≥ 2 mm growth at 6 months, one year, and two years, as well as an adenoma sized < 5 mm without existing risk factors indicates that no further surveillance is required. However, it would be preferable to individualize the management in doubtful cases. Novel interventional modalities for preserving the gallbladder need further evaluation, especially to determine the long-term outcomes.

Key Words: Biliary diseases; True neoplastic polyps; Gallbladder adenomas; Benign biliary tumors; Gallbladder polyps; Extrahepatic biliary neoplasms

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Core Tip: Gallbladder adenomas are rare benign neoplastic lesions associated with malignant potential. Thus, early management is essential to prevent transformation. They are usually detected incidentally by imaging. Current imaging modalities can ensure a reliable diagnosis in vague cases. The management includes either laparoscopic cholecystectomy or ultrasound surveillance.

Citation: Pavlidis ET, Galanis IN, Pavlidis TE. Current considerations for the surgical management of gallbladder adenomas. *World J Gastrointest Surg* 2024; 16(6): 1507-1512

URL: <https://www.wjgnet.com/1948-9366/full/v16/i6/1507.htm>

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4240/wjgs.v16.i6.1507>

INTRODUCTION

Gallbladder polyps affecting 5%-10% of the adult population, consist of nonneoplastic cholesterol pseudopolyps in the vast majority of cases and they are usually discovered incidentally[1]. Adenomas or true neoplastic polyps are rare benign lesions that represent 0.5% of gallbladder neoplasms and 3%-9% of gallbladder polyps[2-5]. However, they can have malignant potential according to their size, which leads to gallbladder cancer with poor prognosis (a 5-year overall survival of 5%-8%)[6]. The malignant transformation process follows the dysplasia-carcinoma in situ-invasive carcinoma sequence[7]. The transformation is related to the adenoma's size, and the transformation rate can be as high as 5% when the size of the adenoma is ≥ 10 mm and is up to 40% when the size of the adenoma is ≥ 20 mm[2,6,8]. The early-stage diagnosis of gallbladder cancer is important for optimizing therapeutic management[9,10]. It is obvious that timely cholecystectomy prevents the progression of any adenoma, but whether timely cholecystectomy is necessary in all patients or constitutes overtreatment in some patients remains unclear[11]. Indications for immediate laparoscopic cholecystectomy include an adenoma size ≥ 10 mm or the presence of specific imaging findings, an age > 50 years and a familial history of GB carcinoma[11-15]. Otherwise, ultrasound follow-up is indicated in patients under 50 years of age who have adenomas that are < 10 mm in size and who do not have any predisposing genetic factors[7,16-19]. A follow-up is not considered necessary for patients who have an adenoma that is < 5 mm in size and who do not have any significant family history[16-19].

The initial diagnostic approach is based on plain abdominal ultrasound. The distinction of adenomas from cholesterol pseudopolyps is a challenging task. The use of computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and current ultrasonic modalities, including simple endoscopic or enhanced contrast endoscopic, high resolution, and novel of three dimensions ultrasound, increase the diagnostic accuracy[6,15,18]. Various scoring system models can accurately predict true adenomas and should be developed[20-24].

The risk of malignant transformation of adenomas is correlated with age > 60 years; the presence of gallstones ≥ 3 cm for at least twenty years; a polyp size equal to or greater than 10 mm; patient origin from Asia, mainly India[25]; chronic infection by *Salmonella*[7] or *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*)[26]; a body mass index greater than 30 kg/m²; a diagnosis of schistosomiasis[27]; a diagnosis of primary sclerosing cholangitis; a polyp with a broad basis; and a thickened gallbladder wall greater than 4 mm and/or the presence of an abnormal gallbladder wall layer[7,15,18,28]. *H. pylori* may not be associated with gallbladder adenoma or gallstone formation[29]. However, the most reliable risk factor for malignant transformation of gallbladder adenomas is size, regardless of the presence or absence of other factors[30].

Minimally invasive procedures for polypectomy alone, in which the gallbladder is preserved and is functional, have recently gained increasing interest[31]. These methods include: (1) Ultrasound-guided radiofrequency for adenoma ablation[32-34]; (2) endoscopic cholecystostomy under ultrasound guidance, which serves as a bridging procedure to endoscopic polypectomy through the gallbladder wall[35,36]; (3) laparoscopic-assisted transumbilical gastroscopy for gallbladder-preserving adenoma resection[37-39]; (4) peroral choledochoscopic gallbladder-preserving adenoma resection[40, 41]; and (5) transgastric endoscopic gallbladder preserving surgery[42]. However, there are still no adequate data available, and these novel approaches require expertise and further evaluation, including further evaluation of the long-term outcomes. Additionally, some skepticism exists about the use of these methods in the current era of laparoscopic cholecystectomy, which is a minimally invasive procedure.

DIAGNOSIS

For gallbladder pathology assessment and differentiation of malignant from benign lesions, the most applicable diagnostic technique worldwide in clinical practice is ultrasound[43-45], and CT[46] and MRI are the second most applicable diagnostic techniques[6,47,48]. However, ultrasound alone is not accurate enough[49]. Further reliability can be obtained with additional CT scans, or better yet, MRI, and this highlights the misdiagnosis bias and can prevent unnecessary operations and thus overtreatment[50]. When a strong possibility of malignancy exists clinically, MRI should be the first-line imaging modality. Contrast-enhanced or endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) is valuable when the equipment is available [28]. High-frequency ultrasound in combination with color Doppler ultrasound constitutes a valuable diagnostic modality with high diagnostic accuracy for gallbladder adenomas (sensitivity of over 90% and specificity of 100%)[51]. High-resolution ultrasound is considered particularly reliable for the assessment of the gallbladder wall layering[49]. In sus-

picious cases, EUS provides high-resolution images, and the combination of EUS with fine needle aspiration ensures the safe diagnosis of malignant transformation of adenomas[52].

During the recommended ultrasound follow-up of small gallbladder adenomas, a growth rate ≥ 2 mm is considered a risk factor for malignant transformation, indicating that there should be no delay in pursuing cholecystectomy[53,54]. In general, a size of 10 mm is considered the limit for operative intervention, while a size of 7 mm is an indication for waiting and ultrasound follow-up[55].

The tumor markers CA19-9, CEA, CA125, and CA242 may be elevated in patients with gallbladder carcinoma, and measurements of these markers can contribute to the early diagnosis of gallbladder carcinoma[56]. In patients with an adenoma ≥ 11 mm in size, increased CA19-9, CEA, and CA72-4 levels constitute strong indications of malignant transformation[57].

SURGICAL MANAGEMENT

The therapeutic management of gallbladder adenomas remains somewhat debated. The European Association for Endoscopic Surgery and other Interventional Techniques, the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, the International Society of Digestive Surgery - European Federation and the European Society of Gastrointestinal and Abdominal Radiology have set guidelines[58], and these guidelines have recently been updated[15]. The recommended management depends on whether symptoms are present and the size and the rate of adenoma growth[28]. However, due to the rarity of gallbladder adenomas, there are few large studies, and the current studies have provided low-quality data and thus somewhat unreliable recommendations. In addition, obtaining new knowledge and following the current guidelines are crucial for the correct treatment of gallbladder adenomas[28].

Cholecystectomy is strongly recommended for adenomas ≥ 10 mm in size, those that are associated with symptoms, regardless of size, and those with a growth rate of ≥ 2 mm within two years. Monitoring is recommended for patients with smaller lesions, regardless of whether the patient is or without risk factors[15,28,58]. The assessment and definition of risk factors is a multidisciplinary task[20,37,58].

For patients with adenomas 6-9 mm in size without growth or a small size increase ≤ 2 mm during the scheduled follow-up at 6 months, one year, and two years, follow-up should be terminated[8,15,28,58]. Cholecystectomy is recommended for patients who are fit for surgery if any risk factor for malignancy is found at the initial diagnosis of adenomas that are 6-9 mm in size, and surgery should be performed after patients are reassured and consent is obtained[6,15,28,58].

For patients with adenomas ≤ 5 mm in size without risk factors, no follow-up is necessary. Otherwise, follow-up lasting two years is recommended[11,15,19,58]. These small adenomas have a low risk of size increase, and there are no reports of malignant transformation in these types of tumors according to long-term (up to 10 years) ultrasound follow-up[59]. Subsequently, small adenoma surveillance has limited benefit and is not recommended[16]. However, when a risk factor coexists, ultrasound surveillance lasting at least 5 years is recommended, and for any 2 mm increase in the adenoma's size, imperative cholecystectomy is recommended[60].

Laparoscopic cholecystectomy is currently the gold standard for gallbladder adenomas that require interventional procedures[6,15,61]. However, if a gallbladder adenoma ≥ 20 mm in size exists, a surgical plan similar to that of gallbladder carcinoma will be drawn up, as long as there are not any preoperative evidence or even an indication of malignancy[62]. Laparoscopic cholecystectomy is not recommended for such patients since there is a strong possibility of malignant transformation[63]. Thus, an open surgery should preferably be carried out by a surgeon experienced in hepatobiliary surgery, who should keep in mind the following cancer management strategy.

For patients with adenomas 10-15 mm in size or with gallbladder wall thickening, it is recommended that an experienced general surgeon safely perform laparoscopic cholecystectomy, as long as there is not any preoperative evidence or even an indication of malignancy. It is of the utmost importance to avoid gallbladder perforation in any case to prevent the possible intraperitoneal spread of cancer cells in cases of initially hidden malignancy, which will eventually be discovered *via* specimen biopsy. This obligation may necessitate the conversion of laparoscopic surgery to open surgery without any hesitation due to the possible operative difficulties encountered[60,64].

In cases where a cholecystectomy specimen biopsy is used to diagnose gallbladder adenocarcinoma, the extent of subsequent surgical resection depends on the disease stage. An already performed simple cholecystectomy is an adequate treatment for stage T1a disease, and no further treatment is needed. Otherwise, for more advanced disease, an additional operation will be needed. Some of the additional operations include wide lymphadenectomy in every case, accompanied by complementary gallbladder bed hepatic resection, in patient with T1b stage; resection of the IV and V hepatic segments for patients with T2 stage; hepatic trisegmentectomy or major hepatectomy with Roux-Y hepaticojejunostomy and, if needed, adjacent organ resection for patients with T3 stage[9,65].

CONCLUSION

Gallbladder adenomas have a low incidence but have a risk of malignancy. These patients are usually asymptomatic, and these tumors are usually detected incidentally by imaging. The management policy must be planned according to whether symptoms are present as well as the size and the rate of adenoma growth. Gallbladder removal is needed for all patients with tumors sized ≥ 10 mm, those patients who have a tumor 6-9 mm in size with a coexisting malignancy risk factor, those who have symptoms, those who have gallstones, and those who have had an adenoma growth rate ≥ 2 mm during the regular two-year ultrasound follow-up. For small adenomas ≤ 5 mm in size without risk factors, no follow-up

is needed. The management of gallbladder adenomas should be individualized in ambiguous cases.

FOOTNOTES

Author contributions: Pavlidis TE designed research, contributed new analytic tools, analyzed data and review; Galanis IN analyzed data and review; Pavlidis ET performed research, analyzed data, review and wrote the article.

Conflict-of-interest statement: Dr. Pavlidis has nothing to disclose.

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S-Editor: Lin C

L-Editor: A

P-Editor: Xu ZH

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