INTRODUCTION

Metastases of the external auditory canal (EAC) are uncommon. Otitis externa (OE) is a common pathology, well known to all medical practitioners. The typical symptoms are ear pain, ototrrhea and sometimes hearing loss. An adenocarcinoma of the pancreas is a more rare pathology, not well known to all medical practitioners. The symptoms are jaundice, belly or back pain, nausea and vomiting, weight loss and poor appetite.

This case is unique since the diagnosis of a pancreatic adenocarcinoma was started by an ENT surgeon because of ear complaints.

CASE

A woman of 52 years old presented at the ENT department with ear pain. She had already taken different antibiotics (local and systemic) and paracetamol prescribed by the general practitioner to treat a presumed OE. Physical examination showed a painful, swollen EAC. Otorrhea was never present.

The ENT surgeon also noted icteric sclera and an obvious weight loss. Because of the long-term ingestion of paracetamol and the icteric sclera, a blood sample was taken, showing a strong hepatic impairment.

Different masses at the level of the pancreas, liver, adrenal gland, lung, subcutis and bone were seen on a CT-scan. A biopsy of the EAC confirmed an adenocarcinoma emanating from the pancreas. Chemotherapy was started. Unfortunately, the patient died couple of months later due to the disease.

DISCUSSION

Primary tumours of the EAC are more common than metastases in the EAC.\(^1,2\) Different types of metastases in the EAC are described: for instance from colon adenocarcinoma, small cell carcinoma of the lung.\(^3,4\) In all these cases, the primary tumour was already known before ear symptoms occured. In case of OE, non-responsive to treatment, we always advise to take a biopsy.

To our knowledge, this is the first case report in which the diagnosis of a pancreatic adenocarcinoma is initiated by a symptomatology that mimics an OE.

CONCLUSION

Otitis externa is a common disease but in very exceptional cases it may be a signal of an underlying condition. This case report shows the importance of obtaining a good medical history and general physical examination.

REFERENCES