<Case Report>

**Candida albicans urinary tract infection in a Shih Tzu dog with immune-mediated hemolytic anemia**

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(Received: February 4, 2017; Revised: April 25, 2017; Accepted: June 5, 2017)

**Abstract:** An 8-year-old castrated male Shih Tzu dog (weighing 7.0 kg) presented with anemia and lethargy. Initial diagnosis indicated immune-mediated hemolytic anemia. During therapy, a secondary urinary infection, probably due to the immune suppressive therapy, was diagnosed. Subsequent diagnostic tests, including urinalysis and urine culture, indicated candidal cystitis. Despite ketoconazole therapy for candidal cystitis, the dog died suddenly. A *Candida albicans* infection was confirmed upon postmortem evaluation. Prolonged immunosuppressive therapy might be the cause of this infection. This is the first case report describing a *Candida albicans* urinary tract infection accompanied by hemolytic anemia in a dog in Korea.

**Keywords:** *Candida albicans*, dog, candidal cystitis, immune-mediated hemolytic anemia, urinary tract infection

*Candida* (C.) *albicans* is an opportunistic fungal pathogen that causes urogenital infections in dogs, although it is typically part of the normal flora in the gastrointestinal, urogenital, and upper respiratory tracts in dogs [9, 11]. The contributing factors involved in a *C. albicans* infection in dogs include immunosuppressive diseases, long-term steroid therapy, mucosal damages, and long-term catheterization in the lower urinary system. Although a *C. albicans* urinary tract infection (UTI) has been well documented in dogs and cats [3, 4, 9], a UTI associated with immune-medicated hemolytic anemia (IMHA) has never been reported in dogs. This case report described a *C. albicans* UTI in a dog, which occurred because of IMHA and a subsequent immunosuppressive therapy.

An 8-year-old castrated male Shih Tzu dog (weighing 7.0 kg) presented with major complaints of abrupt exercise intolerance and marked depression. According to the referring vet, the dog was treated for chronic dermatitis from demodecosis and otitis externa. At presentation, the dog showed pale mucosa and delayed capillary refill time (> ~3.0 sec), suggesting anemia. His heart rate, rectal temperature, and systolic blood pressure were 120 bpm/min, 38.0°C and 135 mmHg, respectively. A routine complete blood cell count (CBC; IDEXX LaserCyte Dx Hematology Analyzer; IDEXX Laboratories, USA) revealed hypochromic regenerative anemia (hemoglobin 7.7 g/dL; reference range [RI], 12.4–19.1 g/dL; hematocrit 22.2%; RI, 29.8–57.5%; reticulocyte 1.37%; RI, 0–1%) and leukocytosis (white blood cells 26.3 × K/µL; RI, 5.4–15.3 × K/µL) with segment neutrophilia (neutrophils 23.3 × K/µL; RI, 1.2–6.8 × K/µL). A blood cytological examination revealed spherocytosis, anisocytosis, and polychromasia, indicating regenerative anemia (Fig. 1). A saline red blood agglutination test confirmed a positive reaction. Blood chemistry analysis (Vetscan; ABAXIS, USA) indicated increased blood urea (40 mg/dL; RI, 7–27 mg/dL) and total bilirubin (1.6 mg/dL; RI, 0–0.9 mg/dL). Based on laboratory tests, the dog was tentatively diagnosed with IMHA and hospitalized for intensive therapy. The dog was initially treated with prednisolone (1 mg/kg, per orally [PO], Solondo; Yuhan, Korea), azathioprine (2 mg/kg, PO, Imuran; Samil pharmaceuticals, Korea), danazol (5 mg/kg, PO, Dana-zol cap; Young Poong Pharmaceuticals, Korea), and ursodeoxycholic acid (15 mg/kg, PO, Q2, Daewoong Pharmaceuticals, Korea). Despite intensive treatment with immunosuppressive drugs, the CBC performed on the next day showed worsening of anemia and leukocytosis (hematocrit 18.7%; hemoglobin 6.2 g/dL; white blood cells 42.6 × K/µL). Therefore, a blood transfusion was performed with packed red blood cells (112 mL) to increase the dog’s hematocrit levels. After the blood transfusion, the anemia improved (hematocrit 29%; hemoglobin 9.4 g/dL), although leukocytosis deteriorated (56.4 × K/µL). After the transfusion, the dog was administered medication including prednisolone (2 mg/kg, PO,
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q12h), azathioprine (2 mg/kg, PO, q24h), danazol (5 mg/kg, PO, q12h), famotidine (15 mg/kg, PO, q24h, Famotidine tab; Withus Pharmaceutical, Korea), biphenyl dimethyl dicarboxylate (8.3 mg/kg, PO, q24h, Lefotil tab; CMG Pharm, Korea), milk thistle extract (35 mg/head, PO, q24h, Silymarin Tab; Sinil pharmaceuticals, Korea), and ursodeoxycholic acid (15 mg/kg/day, PO, q24h). After 20 days of pharmacotherapy, the dog still showed clinically significant anemia (hematocrit 19.4%; hemoglobin 6.5 g/dL; white blood cells 45.6 × 10^6 /µL). Therefore, azathioprine was replaced with cyclosporine (7 mg/kg, PO, q24h, Cypol; Chong Kun Dang pharmaceuticals, Korea). During treatment with cyclosporine, the dog started showing side effects (i.e., vomiting, depression, anorexia, or paleness) and more severe anemia (e.g., hematocrit 16.6%; hemoglobin 5.4 g/dL). Blood chemistry also found increased renal and hepatic enzymes (blood urea 40 mg/dL; alkaline phosphatase 2,028 U/L; RI, 20–150 U/L; alanine transaminase 412 U/L; RI, 10–118 µ/L). To improve his anemic condition, a blood transfusion was repeated with packed red blood cells (80 mL). Although the dog was less anemic after therapy (hematocrit 33.2%; hemoglobin 11 g/dL), his urine was suddenly cloudy. The urine was collected and analyzed. Further urinalysis, including a sediment test, revealed aciduria (pH 6), leukocyturia (mostly neutrophils and macrophages), proteinuria (3+), hemoglobinuria, and funguria (Fig. 2B). Fungal pseudohyphae were found in the urine and thus submitted for a fungal culture confirmation to a commercial veterinary lab (NEODIN Vetlab; Korea). To interoggate the extent of the urinary tract infection, an abdominal ultrasonographic examination was performed in the kidneys and urinary bladder. Ultrasonography revealed pelvic dilation, an irregularly thickened corticomedullary junction in the kidneys, and markedly increased echogeneity of the renal pelvis (Fig. 3A). The wall of the urinary bladder was intact but thickened (Fig. 3B). There was hyperechogenic sediment (arrow head) inside bladder.

The tentative diagnosis was candidal cystitis and the dog was treated with intermittent bladder washing with Triz-EDTA solution (TrizEDTA; Dechra, USA) and with oral medications, including cephalixin (30 mg/kg, q12h, Cephalexin cap; KOLON Pharma, Korea), ketoconazole (10 mg/kg, q12h, Spike tab; JW Pharmaceutical, Korea) and ursodeoxycholic acid (15 mg/kg, q24h). Cyclosporin was again replaced with azathioprine (2 mg/kg, PO, q24h). However, the dog died suddenly after 6 days of therapy at home. A postmortem examination was declined owing to refusal from the owners.

A C. albicans infection was finally confirmed by a fungal culture 10 days after the dog’s death.

This case report described a secondary yeast infection (C. albicans) due to immunosuppressive therapy against IMHA in a dog. Candida spp. are saprophytic yeasts. Three Candida species, including C. albicans, C. parapsilosis, and C. tropicalis, are pathogenic to dogs and occasionally colonize the skin, oral cavity, and urogenital, and gastrointestinal tracts in dogs [10]. Prolonged immunosuppression from several disease conditions can develop into candidiasis in dogs [3, 4, 8, 9]. Even though infections can be confined to the skin, dogs with systemic candidiasis can present more general symptoms, including peritonitis and chronic cystitis [1], as seen in this case. Although one recent study has reported candiduria from chronic cystitis in a dog [1], this is the first case study describing secondary candidal cystitis from immunosuppressive therapy. Six Candida spp. were isolated in one
In conclusion, this case report described a secondary C. albicans UTI resulting from IMHA in a dog. Although a C. albicans UTI has been well documented in dogs and cats, a UTI associated with IMHA has never been reported in dogs. Since the clinical signs from a C. albicans UTI in dogs are mostly obscure, a regular routine urinalysis with a urine culture is required for dogs with immune suppression.

References