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Hemangioma of the knee joint left untreated for 10 years: a case report

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A 26-year-old otherwise healthy female presented with a 10-year history of right knee pain. At the age of 16, she noticed painful swelling on the lateral aspect of the right knee, which was diagnosed as hemangioma from the MRI findings at another hospital. At that time resection of the tumor was attempted arthroscopically but failed since it could not be identified during the surgery, reportedly. For ten years after the initial surgery her pain continued and increased gradually while the quadriceps muscle atrophied and the range of motion of the joint decreased to 30-90 degrees due to pain. The MRI, examined with and without enhancement, showed a vascular tumor in the Hoffa's fat pad and between the lateral collateral ligament and lateral meniscus.

Under arthroscopy the synovium hindered the sight of the tumor but we observed damage of the cartilage of the lateral femoral condyle and, moving the knee, confirmed the tumor and the overlying synovium impinged between the condyle and the lateral meniscus. After partial synovectomy, we were able to identify the tumor clearly and resect the most of it, while the rest was so close to the lateral collateral ligament that we had to resect it through an open incision.

Soon after the surgery, her pain was relieved and the range of motion regained to 0-120 degrees and, 6 months post-op, to 0-140 degrees. The pathological diagnosis was cavernous hemangioma with no malignancy and imaging studies have shown no signs of recurrence.

Synovial hemangioma is a rare benign vascular tumor mostly occurring in the knee. Symptoms are pain, swelling, limitation of the range of motion etc. MRI with enhancement aids the diagnosis. Although natural course of the synovial hemangioma of the knee is not known well, resection seems to be necessary to relieve the symptoms.

In this case, the tumor existed adjacent to the synovium, which made it difficult to detect it arthroscopically, and impingement of the tumor with overlying synovium between the femoral condyle and the meniscus could have caused the damage to the cartilage and the pain she had suffered.