

Lung Cancer During Pregnancy: A Case Report.

Introduction :

Cancer occurring during pregnancy is rare, and bronchopulmonary cancer represents a particularly uncommon location. However, its incidence appears to be increasing due to rising tobacco use among young women and the delayed age at first pregnancy. Diagnosis may be delayed, as respiratory symptoms are often attributed to the physiological changes of pregnancy.

Abstract

Lung cancer during pregnancy is a rare condition associated with significant diagnostic and therapeutic challenges. We report the case of a 44-year-old woman at 36 weeks and 4 days of gestation who presented with progressive dyspnea, dry cough, and night sweats evolving for eight months. Chest CT revealed a locally advanced left pulmonary mass with bilateral pleural effusions and carcinomatous lymphangitis. Histopathological examination of a pleural biopsy confirmed pulmonary adenocarcinoma. Following multidisciplinary discussion, labor was induced, resulting in an uncomplicated delivery, and palliative chemotherapy was initiated postpartum. This case highlights the risk of delayed diagnosis due to the overlap between cancer-related symptoms and physiological changes of pregnancy, emphasizing the importance of early investigation of persistent respiratory symptoms.

Key words:

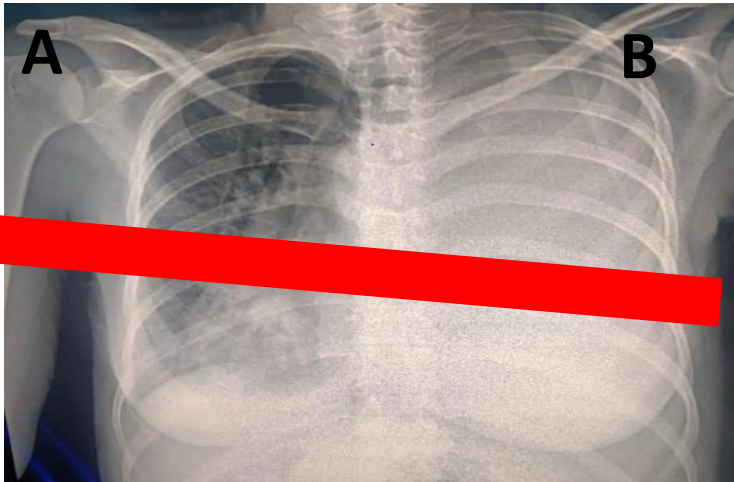
lung cancer, pregnancy, delayed diagnosis, prevention

Case report :

A 44-year-old woman, at 36 weeks and 4 days of gestation, with a history of spontaneous miscarriage and exposure to passive smoking due to her husband's tobacco use, was admitted for evaluation of progressive dyspnea associated with a dry cough and night sweats evolving over the past eight months. These symptoms were initially attributed to pregnancy, resulting in a delayed diagnosis. Clinical examination revealed a left pleural effusion syndrome associated with lower limb edema.

Chest CT angiography demonstrated a locally advanced proximal left pulmonary mass, associated with carcinomatous lymphangitis, bilateral pleural effusion, and pericardial effusion. Therapeutic thoracentesis drained 1000 mL of exudative pleural fluid. Histopathological examination of the pleural biopsy confirmed a diagnosis of bronchopulmonary adenocarcinoma.

Given the advanced gestational age, a multidisciplinary decision was made to induce labor, resulting in an uncomplicated delivery. In the postpartum period, staging work-up was performed and, following discussion at a multidisciplinary tumor board, a palliative approach with systemic chemotherapy was initiated.

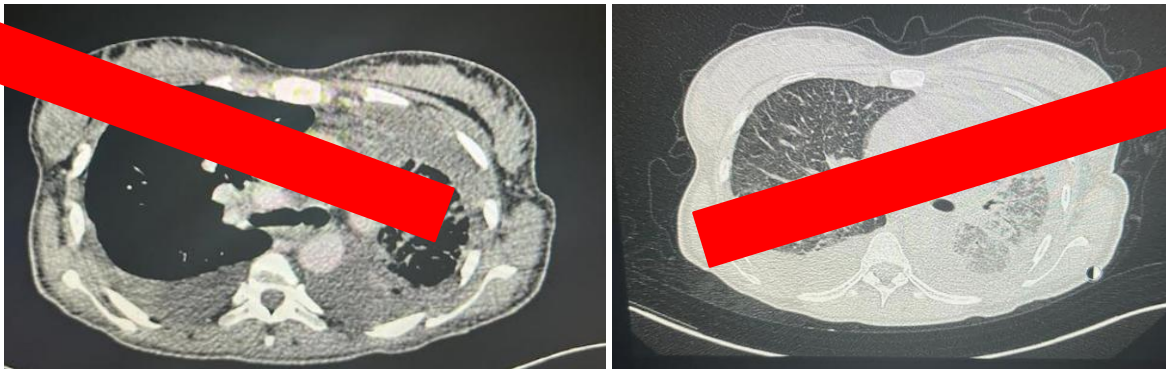


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40 **FIGURE 1 :**

41 A chest radiograph revealed a massive left pleural effusion resulting in near-complete opacification of the left
 42 hemithorax.

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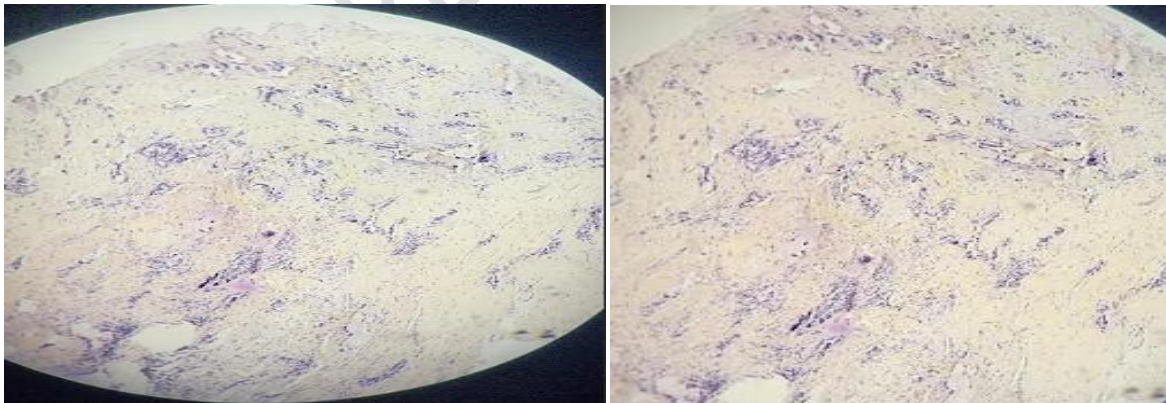
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46 **FIGURE 2 :**

47 Axial mediastinal window CT scan demonstrating a left-sided tumoral mass, associated with bilateral pleural effusions.

48 Coupe axiale fenêtre médiastinale montrant Un processus gauche d'allure tumorale, pleurésie en bilatérales

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52 **Figure 3 :**

53 Histological section showing a carcinomatous tumor proliferation arranged predominantly in trabecular and cord-like patterns, as well as in
 54 isolated single cells. The tumor cells exhibit marked cytological and nuclear atypia, with enlarged nuclei and irregular nuclear contours.
 55 Immunohistochemical study demonstrates tumor cell positivity for CK7 and TTF-1.

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57 Coupe histologique montrant une prolifération tumorale carcinomateuse se disposant essentiellement en travées ,en cordon et en cellules

58 isolées ,les cellules tumorales sont le siège d'atypies cytonucléaires franches ,les noyaux sont augmentés de taille aux contours irréguliers ,

59 l'étude immunohistochimie montre un marquage positif des cellules tumorales par la CK7 et par le TTF1

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61 **Discussion**

62 Lung cancer during pregnancy is exceptional and is usually reported through individual case
63 reports, which may underestimate its true incidence, estimated between 0.07% and 0.1% [1].
64 The majority of cases are non–small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC), while small cell lung
65 cancer, which is less common, is characterized by an aggressive course and rapid
66 development of metastases [2, 3].

67 smoking remains the principal risk factor, with approximately 20–30% of pregnant smokers
68 continuing tobacco exposure during gestation. Nevertheless, other etiological factors are
69 implicated, including activating mutations of the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR),
70 more commonly identified in non-smoking females, as well as hormonal influences.
71 Estrogens are thought to exert a pro-carcinogenic effect, whereas progesterone appears to
72 have an anti-proliferative role by inhibiting cellular proliferation [2, 3].

73 Lung cancer remains associated with a poor prognosis, and its occurrence during pregnancy
74 raises significant diagnostic challenges. The physiological and clinical changes of pregnancy
75 may delay diagnosis, leading to detection at more advanced stages compared with non-
76 pregnant patients. This delayed presentation complicates management and may adversely
77 affect both maternal and fetal outcomes [4].

78 The delayed diagnosis of lung cancer in pregnant women can be mainly explained by two
79 factors. First, common pregnancy-related symptoms such as nausea, fatigue, dyspnea, or dry
80 cough may mask an underlying malignant process and therefore be overlooked. Second,
81 reluctance to perform diagnostic imaging due to concerns about radiation exposure may
82 further delay essential investigations. However, when appropriate abdominal shielding with a
83 lead apron is used, the radiation dose received by the patient remains very low and well below
84 the accepted safety threshold during pregnancy [5].

85 Bronchoscopic sampling and ultrasound-guided lymph node biopsies are the preferred
86 diagnostic procedures whenever feasible. Computed tomography (CT)-guided biopsy
87 represents an alternative approach, taking into account the additional ionizing radiation
88 exposure, which is generally low. Histological sampling requiring general anesthesia may also
89 be performed when necessary, provided that the institution has appropriate facilities for fetal
90 monitoring. In our patient, the histological diagnosis was established by pleural biopsy.

91 Lung cancers are primarily divided into two types. Small cell lung cancer is highly aggressive and
92 often has metastasized by the time of diagnosis. It responds well to chemotherapy and radiation
93 therapy, with chemotherapy being the primary treatment. Non-small cell carcinomas are less
94 responsive to chemotherapy and radiation therapy. When possible, their management relies primarily
95 on surgery. [6].

96 Termination of pregnancy generally does not improve maternal prognosis in the setting of
97 cancer. Chemotherapy administered during the first trimester is associated with an increased
98 risk of spontaneous miscarriage, fetal death, and major congenital malformations. Therefore,
99 it is preferably deferred until the second trimester, although it may still be associated with
100 intrauterine growth restriction and low birth weight.

101 The management of lung cancer during pregnancy is not standardized, unlike that of breast
102 cancer. Available data remain limited; only a small number of patients have been treated with
103 chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Radiotherapy may be safely administered for palliative
104 indications, provided that the fetal radiation dose remains below the critical threshold [4].

105 **Conclusion :**

106 The occurrence of lung cancer during pregnancy, in the postpartum period, or within the months
107 following delivery represents a particularly challenging clinical situation, in which maternal and
108 obstetric concerns intersect with a life-threatening disease. This underscores the crucial importance of
109 preventive strategies, particularly smoking cessation, given that tobacco exposure remains the leading
110 risk factor. Furthermore, early diagnosis relies on a thorough clinical history and careful physical
111 examination and should be supported, when indicated, by appropriate complementary investigations,
112 including imaging studies, in the presence of atypical or persistent respiratory symptoms.

113 **References**

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