Gallstone ileus

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Introduction

An 80-year-old patient presented to the emergency department with right upper quadrant pain, vomiting and fever. An abdominal ultrasound revealed acute cholecystitis with a 37 mm calculus lodged within the gallbladder neck. He was treated non operatively with a view to an interval cholecystectomy.

While waiting for his cholecystectomy, he represented to the emergency department with fever, lower abdominal pain and symptoms of small bowel obstruction. On examination, he was febrile with lower abdominal tenderness. An abdominal CT scan was performed that showed gas within the biliary tree with proximal small bowel obstruction. The point of obstruction was due to an impacted gallstone (from a fistula between the gall bladder and the duodenum) within the proximal small bowel located in the pelvis (Fig. 1).

The patient underwent an emergency laparotomy. The gallstone within the small bowel was identified at approximately 60cm distal to the DJ flexure. The stone was extracted through an enterotomy (Fig. 2).

Gallstone Ileus is a rare complication of cholelithiasis; however, it accounts for approximately 25 percent of non-strangulated small bowel obstruction in patients over 65 years. Management options for treating gallstone ileus include:

1. relieving the obstruction through enterolithotomy alone without cholecystectomy or repair of the fistula;
2. enterolithotomy, cholecystectomy and repair of the fistula at the same time; and
3. enterolithotomy then cholecystectomy and repair of the fistula at later stage.

Most multiple trials conducted to compare the different surgical approaches found that enterolithotomy alone is safe and effective in treating patients with gallstone ileus. The other surgical approaches should be preserved for patients with good cardiorespiratory reserve and with absolute indications for biliary surgery [1–3].

Fig. 1 CT scan showing the point of obstruction

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Fig. 2 Showing the specimen extracted through enterotomy

Conflict of interest The authors do not have any disclosable interest

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