Images in cardiothoracic surgery

Unsuspected vascular anomaly at cervical mediastinoscopy

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Blunt dissection during cervical mediastinoscopy revealed an aberrant right common carotid artery traversing the front of the trachea, just below the isthmus of the thyroid gland. Magnetic resonance arteriogram (MRA) is shown in Fig. 1 with a schematic diagram in Fig. 2. We highlight this vascular anomaly (prevalence 0.5\%) which can jeopardize the safety of cervical mediastinoscopy.

Fig. 1. MRA showing common carotid trunk arising anteriorly with both subclavian origins more posteriorly. AA, aortic arch; CCT, common carotid trunk; RCA, right common carotid artery; LCA, left common carotid artery; RSA, right subclavian artery; LSA, left subclavian artery.

Fig. 2. Schematic diagram based on Fig. 1 showing the aberrant right common carotid artery passing almost horizontally across the superior mediastinum just above the level of a high aortic arch. * marks the site of potential injury at mediastinoscopy.