Images in cardio-thoracic surgery

Intrathoracic hepatocarcinoma: when a thoracic mass is a fake

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An asymptomatic 81-year-old woman underwent an occasional chest X-ray (Fig. 1A), followed by a chest computed tomography (CT) scan (Fig.1B and C), revealing a possible intrathoracic tumour.

In the preoperative studies, the incidental finding of an increased alpha-fetoprotein puzzled us enough to wait for CT-guided biopsy, which diagnosed an unresectable hepatocarcinoma, and avoided an unnecessary right thoracotomy.

Perhaps a magnetic resonance scan would have showed the sub-diaphragmatic site of the lesion; however, our final thought is that a CT-guided biopsy is mandatory in a case like this, before programming any treatment.

Fig. 1. A radiogram demonstrated an opacification of the right lower hemithorax (Panel A); a chest CT scan revealed a huge intrathoracic encapsulated mass with disomogenous pattern, necrotic areas, determinating compression and dislocation of the mediastinum (Panels B and C).

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