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## Contents

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## REVIEW

- 2582 Controversies in the management of acute pancreatitis: An update  
*Manrai M, Dawra S, Singh AK, Jha DK, Kochhar R*
- 2604 Classification of osteogenesis imperfecta: Importance for prophylaxis and genetic counseling  
*Panzaru MC, Florea A, Caba L, Gorduza EV*

## MINIREVIEWS

- 2621 Emerging role of dual biologic therapy for the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease  
*McCormack MD, Wahedna NA, Aldulaimi D, Hawker P*
- 2631 Pancreatic cancer and depression  
*Michoglou K, Ravinthiranathan A, San Ti S, Dolly S, Thillai K*
- 2637 Mediastinal lesions in children  
*Çinar HG, Gulmez AO, Üner Ç, Aydin S*
- 2657 Exit strategies in inflammatory bowel disease: Looking beyond anti-tumor necrosis factors  
*Crispino F, Michielan A, Grova M, Tieppo C, Mazza M, Rogger TM, Armelao F*
- 2670 Medicinal cannabis products for the treatment of acute pain  
*Fiore M, Alfieri A, Di Franco S, Petrou S, Damiani G, Pace MC*
- 2677 Role of vitamin D in irritable bowel syndrome  
*Yu XL, Wu QQ, He LP, Zheng YF*

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Retrospective Cohort Study

- 2684 Analysis of oxidative stress and antioxidative potential in premature ovarian insufficiency  
*Kakinuma K, Kakinuma T*

## Retrospective Study

- 2694 Surgical management of pituitary adenoma during pregnancy  
*Jia XY, Guo XP, Yao Y, Deng K, Lian W, Xing B*
- 2708 Role of pre-existing incomplete intestinal metaplasia in gastric adenocarcinoma: A retrospective case series analysis  
*Bogdanova I, Polaka I, Aleksandraviča I, Dzērve Z, Anarkulova L, Novika V, Tolmanis I, Leja M*

**Observational Study**

- 2716** Severe/critical COVID-19 early warning system based on machine learning algorithms using novel imaging scores  
*Li QY, An ZY, Pan ZH, Wang ZZ, Wang YR, Zhang XG, Shen N*
- 2729** Mediating effect of mindfulness level on the relationship between marital quality and postpartum depression among primiparas  
*Yang J, Lin XZ, Guo QW, Wang CL, Yang RY, Zhang JW, Zeng Y*
- 2740** Ferric carboxymaltose for anemia in Crohn's disease patients at a tertiary center: A retrospective observational cohort study  
*Siqueira NSN, Pascoal LB, Rodrigues BL, de Castro MM, Martins ASC, Araiho DOS, Gomes LEM, Camargo MG, Ayrizono MLS, Leal RF*

**META-ANALYSIS**

- 2753** Is metaphyseal ulnar shortening osteotomy superior to diaphyseal ulnar shortening osteotomy in the treatment of ulnar impaction syndrome? A meta-analysis  
*Deng HL, Lu ML, Tang ZM, Mao QL, Zhao JM*
- 2766** Relationship between body mass index and short-term postoperative prognosis in patients undergoing colorectal cancer surgery  
*Li Y, Deng JJ, Jiang J*

**CASE REPORT**

- 2780** Cardiac amyloidosis presenting as pulmonary arterial hypertension: A case report  
*Gao M, Zhang WH, Zhang ZG, Yang N, Tong Q, Chen LP*
- 2788** Short-term outcome of total knee replacement in a patient with hemophilia: A case report and review of literature  
*Yin DL, Lin JM, Li YH, Chen P, Zeng MD*
- 2796** Modified inferior oblique anterior transposition for dissociated vertical deviation combined with superior oblique palsy: A case report  
*Zong Y, Wang Z, Jiang WL, Yang X*
- 2803** Treatment of talipes equinovarus after triceps surae intramuscular hemangioma surgery by Ilizarov technology in adults: A case report  
*Chen ZX, Wang MY, Zhang C, Ding ZQ, Chen W*
- 2811** Open surgery: Still a great option to treat patients with post-traumatic arteriovenous fistulas: A case report  
*Kalinin R, Suchkov I, Mzhavanadze N, Borisova Y, Panin I*
- 2817** Recovery from Bell's palsy after treatment using uncultured umbilical cord-derived mesenchymal stem cells: A case report  
*Ahn H, Jung WJ, Lee SY, Lee KH*

- 2825** Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor detected by technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile single photon emission computed tomography/computed tomography: A case report  
*Liu CJ, Yang HJ, Peng YC, Huang DY*
- 2832** Furazolidone-induced pulmonary toxicity in *Helicobacter pylori* infection: Two case reports  
*Ye Y, Shi ZL, Ren ZC, Sun YL*
- 2839** Efficacy of anlotinib combined with radioiodine to treat scalp metastasis of papillary thyroid cancer: A case report and review of literature  
*Zhang LY, Cai SJ, Liang BY, Yan SY, Wang B, Li MY, Zhao WX*
- 2848** Endoscopic ultrasound-guided transrectal drainage of a pelvic abscess after Hinchey II sigmoid colon diverticulitis: A case report  
*Drnovšek J, Čebren Ž, Grosek J, Janež J*

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# Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor detected by technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile single photon emission computed tomography/computed tomography: A case report

Chang-Jiang Liu, Hua-Jun Yang, Yan-Chun Peng, De-Yu Huang

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## Abstract

### BACKGROUND

Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors (NETs) account for about 1%-2% of pancreatic tumors and about 8% of all NETs. Computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging, and endoscopic ultrasound are common imaging modalities for the diagnosis of pancreatic NETs. Furthermore, somatostatin receptor imaging is of great value for diagnosing pancreatic NETs. Herein, we report the efficacy of technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile (<sup>99m</sup>Tc-MIBI) single photon emission CT (SPECT)/CT for detecting pancreatic NETs.

### CASE SUMMARY

A 57-year-old woman presented to our hospital with a 1-d history of persistent upper abdominal distending pain. The distending pain in the upper abdomen was aggravated after eating, with nausea and retching. Routine blood test results showed a high neutrophil percentage, low leukomonocyte and monocyte percentages, and low leukomonocyte and eosinophil counts. Amylase, liver and kidney function, and tumor markers alpha-fetoprotein, carcinoembryonic antigen, and cancer antigen (CA) 125, CA72-4, CA19-9, and CA153 were normal. Abdominal CT showed a mass, with multiple calcifications between the pancreas and the spleen. The boundary between the mass and the pancreas and spleen was poorly defined. Contrast-enhanced CT revealed that the upper abdominal mass

was unevenly and gradually enhanced.  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT revealed that a focal radioactive concentration, with mild radioactive concentration extending into the upper abdominal mass, was present at the pancreatic body and tail. The  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT manifestations were consistent with the final pathological diagnosis of pancreatic NET.

### CONCLUSION

$^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT appears to be a valuable tool for detecting pancreatic NETs.

**Key Words:** Neuroendocrine tumors; Pancreas; Tc-99m-Methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile; Single photon emission computed tomography; X-ray computed tomography; Case report

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**Core Tip:** Neuroendocrine tumors (NETs) are rare. The gastroenteropancreatic tract is the most common site for NETs. Pancreatic NETs account for about 1%-2% of pancreatic tumors and about 8% of all NETs. Endoscopic ultrasound, computed tomography (CT), and magnetic resonance imaging are common imaging modalities for the diagnosis of pancreatic NETs. In addition, somatostatin receptor imaging is of great value for the diagnosis of pancreatic NETs. We experienced a case of pancreatic NET detected by technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile ( $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI) single-photon emission CT/CT, which was consistent with the final pathological diagnosis of pancreatic NET.

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## INTRODUCTION

Neuroendocrine tumors (NETs) are relatively rare tumors arising from cells in the diffuse neuroendocrine system, occurring mainly in the gastroenteropancreatic (GEP) tract and lungs[1]. The GEP tract is the most common site for NETs[2]. Pancreatic NETs account for about 1%-2% of all pancreatic tumors [3] and about 8% of all NETs[4]. The diagnostic imaging modalities for pancreatic NETs include computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging, endoscopic ultrasound, and somatostatin receptor imaging[5]. However, the application of technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile ( $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI) single photon emission CT (SPECT)/CT for detecting pancreatic NET has not been reported.

## CASE PRESENTATION

### Chief complaints

A 57-year-old woman presented with upper abdominal distending pain lasting 1 d.

### History of present illness

The patient had persistent pain that was aggravated after eating, accompanied by nausea and retching. Her abdominal CT findings revealed an upper abdominal tumor originating from the spleen or pancreas. Therefore, she was admitted to the hospital for further examination and treatment.

### History of past illness

The patient underwent traumatic abdominal exploratory surgery more than 30 years ago.

### Physical examination

An old surgical scar with a longitudinal length of about 6 cm was observed on the upper abdomen. A mass was palpable in the left-upper abdomen, which was hard, poor in mobility, and slightly tender.

### Laboratory examinations

Routine blood test results showed a high neutrophil percentage, low lymphocyte and monocyte percentages, and a low eosinophil count. Routine urine and stool test results were normal. The levels of

electrolytes (sodium, chlorine, calcium, and magnesium) were normal. Amylase, liver and kidney function, and tumor markers alpha-fetoprotein, carcinoembryonic antigen, carbohydrate antigen (CA) 125, CA72-4, CA19-9, and CA153 were also normal.

### Imaging examinations

**CT and contrast-enhanced CT of the abdomen:** Abdominal CT showed a mass with multiple calcifications between the pancreas and the spleen. The boundary between the mass and the pancreas and spleen was poorly defined (Figure 1). The maximum cross section of the mass was about 9.0 cm × 8.6 cm. Contrast-enhanced CT revealed that the upper abdominal mass was unevenly and gradually enhanced (Figure 2).

**Abdominal  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT:**  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT was performed 5 d after contrast-enhanced CT imaging. Scanning began 30 min after the injection of 740 MBq of  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI. Abdominal  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT was performed using a PRECEDENCE SPECT/CT (Philips Medical Systems, Eindhoven, the Netherlands) system. CT scanning was performed in a spiral mode over the entire abdomen at 250 mAs per slice, 120 Kv, and with a slice thickness of 3.0 mm. Immediately after CT scanning, SPECT acquisition of the abdomen was performed. The SPECT system was equipped with low-energy, high-resolution parallel-hole collimators. The SPECT acquisition followed an elliptical orbit, with a step-and-shoot acquisition of 64 angles over 360° (180° per detector) and an acquisition time of 20 s per frame. The SPECT data were reconstructed with attenuation correction from CT acquisition and iterative reconstruction *via* AutoSPECT Pro software with astonish, four iterations, and 16 subsets. The  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT fused images were processed using Fusion Viewer (version 2.1) procedures. The SPECT slice thickness was the same as that of CT.

The  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT images showed the presence of a focal radioactive concentration, with mild radioactive concentration extending into the upper abdominal mass at the pancreatic body and tail (Figure 3).

## FINAL DIAGNOSIS

The pathology of the pancreatic lesion indicated a well-differentiated pancreatic NET by hematoxylin and eosin staining (Figure 4A and B). The pathology of the spleen showed normal spleen cells by hematoxylin and eosin staining (Figure 4C). Immunohistochemical analysis showed that the tumor cells were positive for insulinoma-associated protein 1, synaptophysin, and cluster of differentiation 56 (Figure 5). The Ki-67 (marker of proliferation Ki-67) proliferative index was assessed at 10% (Figure 6).

## TREATMENT

Two days after  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT, the pancreatic body and tail, the upper abdominal mass discovered by CT (the mass with multiple calcifications between the pancreas and the spleen), and the spleen were excised. During the operation, a pancreatic lesion was seen to expand outward and extend into the spleen. This was inconsistent with the abdominal CT findings.

## OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP

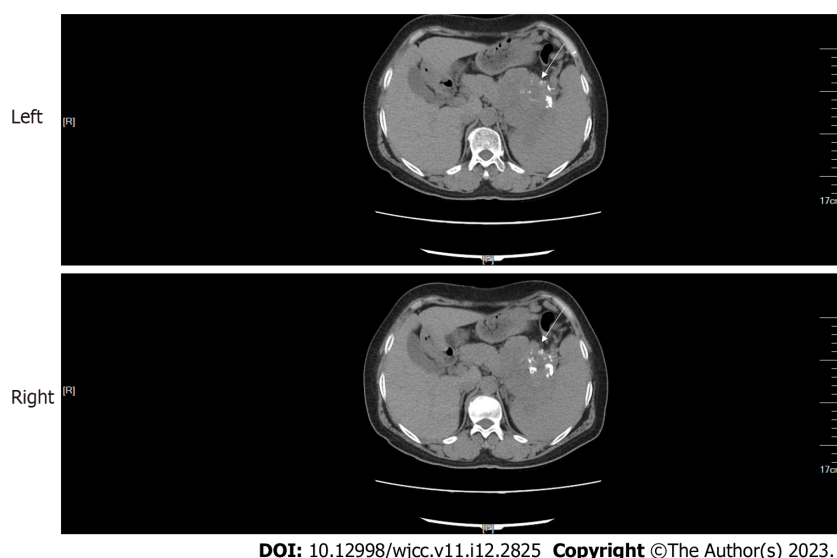
The patient was followed up 35 d after surgery. She complained of dull pain in her upper abdomen. Abdominal CT results showed encapsulated effusion in the surgical area (Figure 7), with no obvious abnormality in the remaining area. The patient's condition improved after ultrasound-guided closed abdominal drainage.

## DISCUSSION

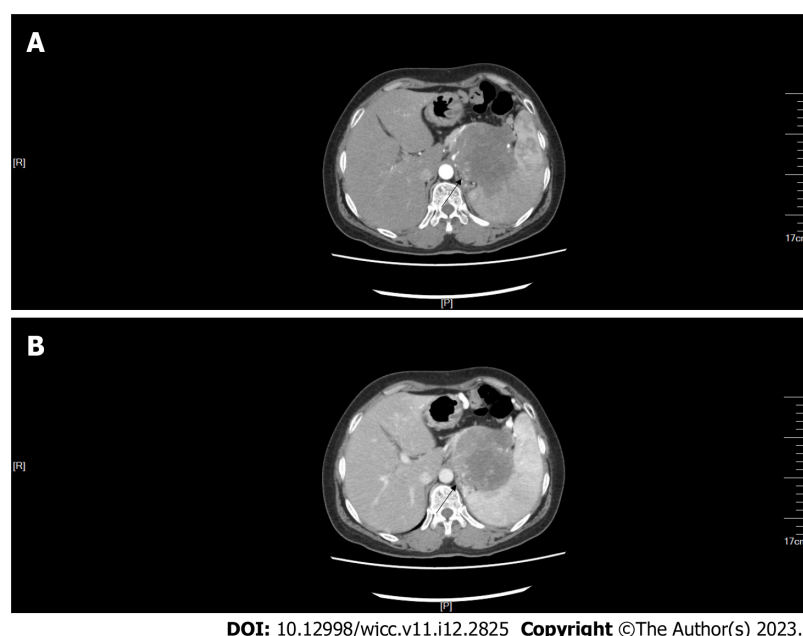
Pancreatic NETs are often divided into functional and nonfunctional pancreatic NETs. The majority of pancreatic NETs are nonfunctional[5]. The symptoms of a nonfunctional pancreatic NET include abdominal or back pain, nausea, vomiting, pancreatitis, and obstructive jaundice[5]. Patients with functional pancreatic NETs often present with symptoms caused by hormone production of the tumor, leading to an early diagnosis[6].

Endoscopic ultrasound, CT, and magnetic resonance imaging are common imaging modalities for the diagnosis of pancreatic NETs. In addition, somatostatin receptor imaging is of great value for the diagnosis of pancreatic NETs[7], but the method is not easily available in our hospital.





**Figure 1 Abdominal computed tomography.** A mass (arrow) with multiple calcifications between the pancreas and the spleen was observed. The boundary between the mass and the pancreas and spleen was poorly defined.

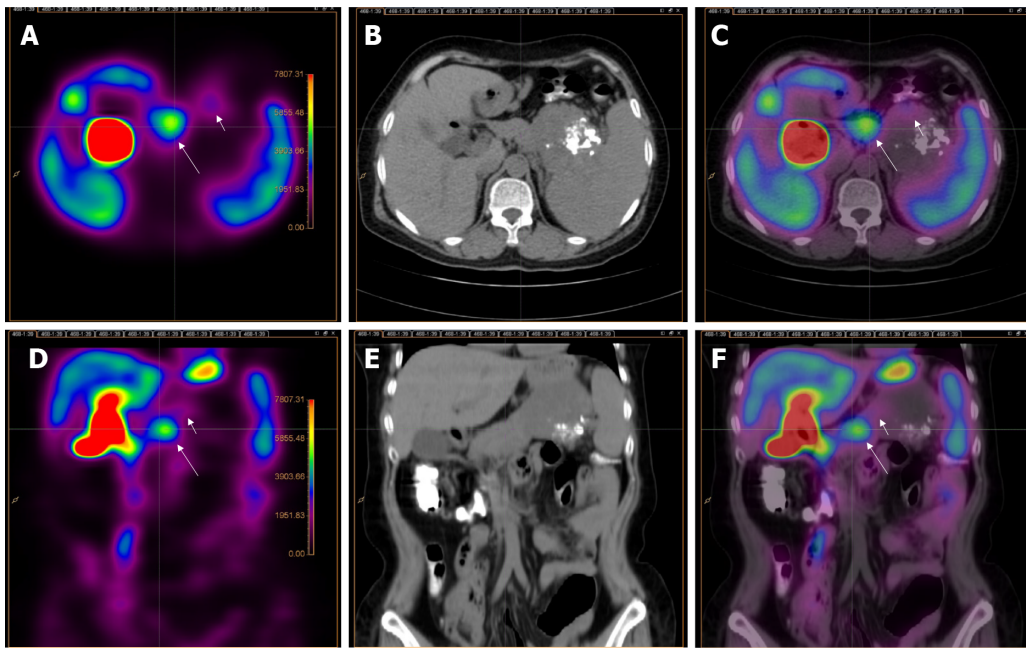


**Figure 2 Abdominal computed tomography with contrast showed that the upper abdominal mass was unevenly and gradually enhanced (arrow).** A: Arterial time; B: Venous time.

More than 90% of well-differentiated GEP NETs express somatostatin receptors[8]. Functional imaging technique of gallium-68 dota-octreotate ( $^{68}\text{Ga}$ -DOTATATE) positron emission tomography (PET)/CT uses radiolabeled somatostatin analogs to localize NETs. Research showed that the sensitivity of  $^{68}\text{Ga}$ -DOTATATE PET/CT was about 95% for detecting pancreatic NETs[7]. Unlike  $^{68}\text{Ga}$ -DOTATATE,  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI is a nonspecific tumor imaging agent. However, compared with  $^{68}\text{Ga}$ -DOTATATE PET/CT,  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT is a relatively cheap and easily available imaging modality. Herein, we present a case of pancreatic NETs detected by  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT.

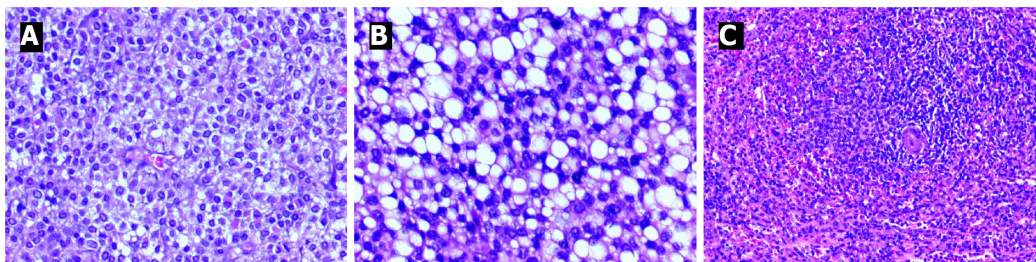
$^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI is a lipophilic univalent cationic agent. Driven by cytoplasmic and mitochondrial transmembrane potential gradients,  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI penetrates reversibly into the cytoplasm and concentrates in mitochondria[9]. In one study, there were greater electrical gradients from outside the cell to the mitochondria in carcinoma cells than in normal epithelial cells, and the uptake of  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI increased tenfold in carcinoma cells[9].

$^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT may be a useful tool for detecting lymph node and lung metastases in patients with differentiated thyroid carcinoma[10]. Additionally,  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT can be used to differentiate benign from malignant solitary pulmonary nodules and thyroid nodes[11,12]. Lu *et al*[13] reported a



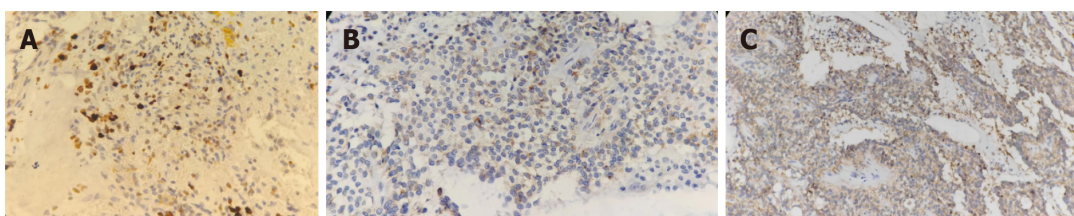
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**Figure 3 Abdominal technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile single photon emission computed tomography/computed tomography.** Technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT)/CT of the abdomen showed that a focal radioactive concentration (long arrow) with mild radioactive concentration (short arrow) was present on SPECT (A, D) and technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile SPECT/CT fusion images (C, F) at the sites corresponding to the pancreatic body and tail and the upper abdominal mass discovered by CT (B, E). A-C: Transverse axis; D-F: Coronal axis.



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**Figure 4 Hematoxylin and eosin staining.** A: The pathology of the focal radioactive concentration of the pancreatic body and tail shown on technetium-99m methoxy-2-isobutylisonitrile single photon emission computed tomography (CT)/CT indicated a well-differentiated pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor *via* hematoxylin and eosin staining ( $\times 200$ ); B: The pathology of the upper abdominal mass shown on CT indicated a well-differentiated pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor *via* hematoxylin and eosin staining ( $\times 200$ ); C: Normal spleen cells observed after hematoxylin and eosin stain ( $\times 100$ ).

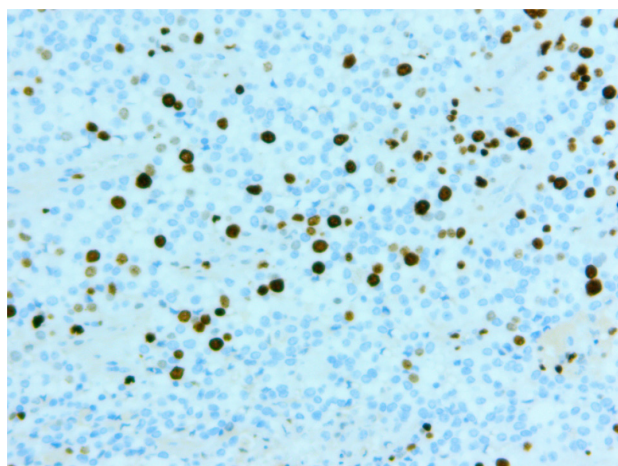


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**Figure 5 Immunohistochemical staining of tumor cells.** A: Positive for insulinoma-associated protein 1; B: Positive for synaptophysin; C: Positive for cluster of differentiation 56 ( $\times 200$ ).

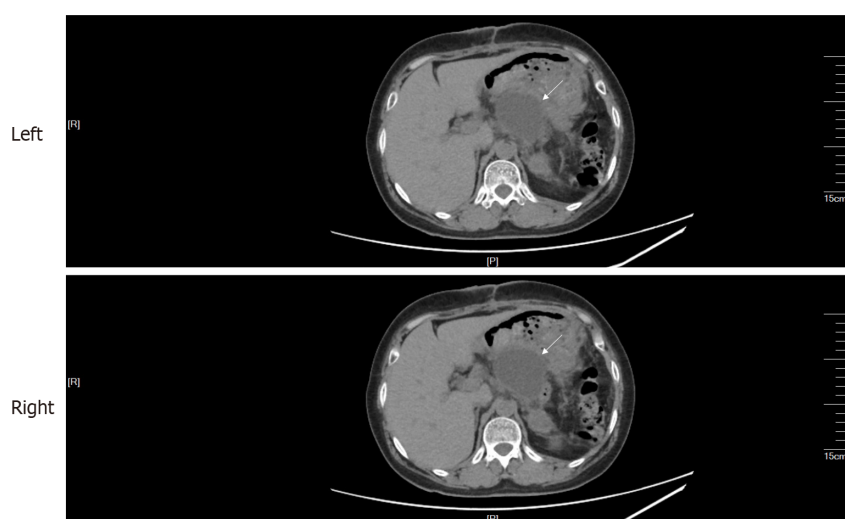
case of mediastinal typical carcinoid tumor detected by  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT.

Our patient was a 57-year-old woman with symptoms that started 1 d previously. The age for the occurrence of pancreatic NETs is equivalent to the mean age (57-58 years) previously identified for this type of tumor[5]. The patient's abdominal CT showed a mass with multiple calcifications between the



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**Figure 6** Immunohistochemical staining (EnVision technique) showed Ki-67 (marker of proliferation Ki-67) proliferative index of 10% ( $\times 400$ ).



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**Figure 7** Encapsulated effusion (arrow) in the surgical area.

pancreas and spleen. The boundary between the mass and pancreas and spleen was poorly defined. These findings indicated that the tumor might have originated from the spleen or pancreas. Contrast-enhanced CT revealed that the mass was unevenly and gradually enhanced. This indicated the possibility of a malignant tumor. However,  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT showed the presence of a focal radioactive concentration, with mild radioactive concentration extending into the upper abdominal mass at the pancreatic body and tail. This finding strongly suggested that the upper abdominal mass originated from the pancreas. The CT manifestations of the pancreatic tissue corresponding to the focal radioactive concentration were solid and homogenous. A previous study reported that pancreatic NETs tended to appear as solid and homogenous lesions on CT imaging[7]. In our case study, the  $^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT manifestations were consistent with the final pathological diagnosis of pancreatic NET.

## CONCLUSION

$^{99m}\text{Tc}$ -MIBI SPECT/CT appears to be valuable for diagnosing pancreatic NETs. However, subsequent large-sample studies are needed to confirm this finding.



## FOOTNOTES

**Author contributions:** Liu CJ and Yang HJ conceived the idea; Liu CJ designed the research; Liu CJ, Yang HJ, Peng YC, and Huang DY analyzed the data and wrote the manuscript; all authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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