Bilateral presence of a variant subscapularis muscle

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ABSTRACT

We describe the presence of an accessory subscapularis muscle observed bilaterally in a human anatomy laboratory. The muscle originated from the mid-region of the lateral subscapularis inserting into the proximal humerus with the tendon of the subscapularis. The axillary and lower subscapular nerves coursed between the observed muscle and the subscapularis. The presence of the muscle has potential to entrap the axillary nerve and the lower subscapular nerve.

Key Words: Accessory subscapularis; Axillary nerve; Lower subscapular nerve; Entrapment

INTRODUCTION

Several anatomic variations in axillary musculature have been reported (1-4). One of the more common variations is the axillary arch muscle, also known as Langer’s muscle, the axillopectoral muscle, and the pectordorsal muscle (3,4). This muscle typically arises from the lateral aspect of the latissimus dorsi inserting deep to the pectoralis major on the humerus. Several variations of the axillary arch muscle are described with a reported incidence of 6-9% (4-6). Less frequent and distinctly different than the axillary arch muscle is the accessory subscapularis muscle. This has been termed the subcapsulohumeral muscle, subscapularis minor, subscapularis-teres-lattissimus muscle, and the accessory subscapularis muscle (1,2,7). Reported incidence ranges from 0.45 to 2.6% (2,7).

CASE REPORT

A variant muscle associated with the subscapularis bilaterally was observed on a Caucasian female embalmed cadaver during routine dissection in a human anatomy class for first year physical therapy students. The variant muscle was observed on the ventral surface of the subscapularis muscle. The variant muscle appeared to be associated with the subscapularis. The muscle originated from the mid-region of the lateral subscapularis inserting into the proximal humerus with the tendon of the subscapularis. Innervation was via the lower subscapular nerve. On the right side (Figure 1), the muscle was approximately 1.5 cm in width and 7 cm in length. On the left side, the muscle was 1 cm in width and 7 cm in length. Both axillary and lower subscapular nerves passed between the variant muscle and the subscapularis proper. This relationship of nerve course to the variant muscle was observed bilaterally. The presence of the muscle represents an anatomic site at which the axillary nerve and the lower subscapular nerve could be susceptible to entrapment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The clinical relevance of variant axillary muscles includes the potential for vascular, sensory, and motor compromise. The axillary arch muscle has the potential to compress neurovascular structures in positions of shoulder abduction and external rotation producing symptoms similar to thoracic outlet (6,8). Quadrangular space syndrome is compression of the axillary nerve and posterior humeral circumflex artery which may be secondary to outlet (6,8). Reported incidence ranges from 0.45 to 2.6% (2,7).

REFERENCES


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