

NEUROENDOCRINE CARCINOMAS OF THE UPPER AIRWAYS: A SMALL CASE SERIES WITH HISTOPATHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Neuroendocrine carcinomas are rare tumors. In the head and neck region they are most common in the larynx, where they represent 0.5-1% of epithelial cancers. Diagnosis requires the recognition of the typical neuroendocrine architecture and morphology and the immunohistochemical confirmation of neuroendocrine differentiation. In the 1991 WHO classification laryngeal neuroendocrine carcinomas have been divided into carcinoids, atypical carcinoids, small cell carcinomas and paragangliomas. Atypical carcinoids in the head and neck region usually show an aggressive behavior analogous to poorly differentiated carcinomas, and are resistant to chemo- and radiotherapy. For this reason, it was recently proposed to

change their designation to “moderately differentiated neuroendocrine carcinomas”.

We present the clinical and histopathological features of 2 moderately differentiated neuroendocrine carcinomas of the larynx, one large cell poorly differentiated neuroendocrine carcinoma of the oropharynx, and one small cell carcinoma of the minor salivary glands of the tongue. The patient with small cell carcinoma was free from disease 26 months after radical surgery, while the other patients showed liver, lung and bone metastases 18, 26 and 24 months after the diagnosis despite radical surgery or concomitant intra-arterial chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Key words: atypical carcinoid, head and neck tumor, immunohistochemistry, neuroendocrine carcinoma.