Phaeochromocytomas are rare catecholamine secreting tumours arising from the chromaffin cells in adrenal medulla

Annual incidence 0.8 per 100,000 person years

The classic clinical features are episodic headache, sweating & tachycardia (with/without hypertension)

A small minority of cases are asymptomatic

This case highlights the retrospective diagnosis of an ‘asymptomatic phaeochromocytoma’ in a patient presenting with acute surgical emergency

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

- U&E’s (including K) – Normal
- Random Cortisol – 584nmol/L (180-450nmol/L)
- Plasma metanephrines -> 25,000 (Normal <800)
- CT abdomen/Thorax

Case Discussion

The lady underwent semi-urgent adrenalectomy after appropriate alpha and beta-blockade. Histology showed a benign phaeochromocytoma (Ki 67 <2%). Genetic testing for various conditions associated with phaeochromocytoma were negative

Conclusion

This case highlights the importance of taking a step back in similar circumstances and thinking about possible phaeochromocytoma even in the absence of classical signs and symptoms