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Asymptomatic large lingual thyroid

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To the Editor:

Ectopic thyroid is a rare condition resulting from thyroid gland developmental dysgenesis. The thyroid originates from neural crest cells of the pharyngeal pouches [1] and during the fifth week of gestation, it descends from the base of the tongue to its normal position in the pretracheal region [2]. Any disturbance in the migration leads to ectopic thyroid. Lingual thyroid is the most common type of ectopic thyroid. It is usually asymptomatic and the only thyroid tissue remnant in most cases that require special consideration [3].

A fourteen-year-old girl presented with a large mass located on the base of her tongue. It was an approximately 2.5cm, white, round, soft mass (**Figure 1**). On physical examination, the thyroid gland was absent in its usual region in the anterior neck. However, all thyroid function tests remained within normal limits. Ultrasonography of the anterior neck region showed no thyroid gland in the cervical region. The patient was diagnosed with ectopic lingual thyroid. Despite the large size of the mass and its position, the patient was asymptomatic.

Lingual thyroid is an extremely rare organ dysgenesis, affecting approximately one in 100,000 to 300,000[4]. The condition is usually asymptomatic, but with an increase in diameter, frequency of dysphagia, respiratory obstruction, and bleeding increases [2]. In most cases, thyroid hormone production is impaired [3]. We present a patient with a large asymptomatic ectopic lingual thyroid with normal thyroid function. Neck imaging was negative for any other thyroid tissue.

Recognition of ectopic thyroid is challenging. Most of the cases undergo unnecessary surgeries attributed to misdiagnosis. Treatment differs according to symptoms and function of the remnant thyroid, from medical treatment and administration of thyroxin to various surgical interventions. In our case, none of the above managements were required owing to the normal performance of the gland.

Despite the rarity of this condition, medical practitioners should be aware of lingual thyroid to distinguish this from other intraoral masses and



Figure 1: Mass located on the base of tongue.

avoid unnecessary surgery since the ectopic gland may be the only thyroid tissue.

Potential conflicts of interest

There was no conflict of interest to declare.

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