

1 *Original Article*

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3 **Pulmonary aspergillosis as a late complication after surgery for locally advanced**
4 **non-small cell lung cancer treated with induction chemoradiotherapy**

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1 **Abstract**

2 **Purpose:** Some long-term survivors after surgery for locally advanced non-small cell lung
3 cancer (NSCLC) treated with induction chemoradiotherapy (trimodality treatment) develop
4 chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA). The aim of our study was to assess the
5 characteristics and outcomes of CPA that develops after trimodality treatment.

6 **Methods:** We retrospectively reviewed the data of 187 NSCLC patients who underwent
7 trimodality treatment between 1999 and 2018.

8 **Results:** Six male ever-smoker patients developed CPA. All 6 patients had undergone
9 extended resection for NSCLC and had a history of either adjuvant chemotherapy (n=3)
10 or radiation pneumonitis (n=4). Among the 4 patients with CPA localized in a single lung,
11 3 patients were treated surgically (completion pneumonectomy or cavernostomy) and 1
12 patient was treated with antifungal therapy alone. Both treatments led to the improved
13 control of CPA. In contrast, patients with CPA in both lungs were not candidates for surgery,
14 and died of CPA. The survival rates after trimodality treatment in the CPA group and the
15 group without CPA were comparable (10-year survival rate, 50.0% vs. 57.6%, $P=0.59$).

16 **Conclusion:** The early diagnosis of CPA localized in a single lung after NSCLC surgery
17 is critical to improving control and survival in patients with CPA.

18

19 **Keywords:** lung cancer; aspergillosis; surgery; radiation; chemotherapy

1 **Introduction**

2 Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA), including simple aspergilloma and chronic
3 cavitary pulmonary aspergillosis, sometimes develops in non-immunocompromised
4 patients with prior or current lung disease [1]. Risk factors for CPA include chemotherapy
5 [2], radiotherapy, thoracic surgery, and lung cancer [3-6], which are inevitable in patients
6 who have undergone induction chemoradiotherapy followed by surgery for non-small cell
7 lung cancer (NSCLC). Induction chemoradiotherapy followed by surgery has been shown
8 to be a feasible therapeutic option for patients with locally advanced NSCLC [7], and this
9 trimodality therapy for NSCLC has been shown to provide favorable long-term results [8],
10 which have led to an increase in survivors of NSCLC. Thus, long-term survivors may
11 develop CPA due to risk factors for CPA that are involved in trimodality therapy, despite
12 the irradiated lung containing the NSCLC being resected at surgery. Furthermore, the risk
13 of CPA may be increased by chronic obstructive lung disease, which is a common
14 comorbidity of ever-smoker NSCLC patients as well as by prolonged corticosteroid
15 therapy for radiation pneumonitis, which sometimes develops as a complication after
16 chemoradiotherapy [1, 6, 9]. Although evidence has accumulated on the treatment of
17 NSCLC by induction chemoradiotherapy followed by surgery [10], little information is
18 available in relation to CPA after the trimodality therapy. The aim of our study was to
19 assess the characteristics and outcomes of CPA after surgery for locally advanced NSCLC
20 treated by induction chemoradiotherapy.

21

22 **Methods**

23 ***Patients***

24 Trimodality therapy has been performed to treat NSCLC patients with mediastinal nodal

1 metastasis. It has also been selectively applied to the treatment of localized N3 or T3-
2 4N0-1M0 and, at the physician's discretion, to patients with large or invasive tumors, such
3 as bulky N1 tumors with chest wall invasion, or T4 involvement, as a means of achieving
4 complete resection with a pathologic safety margin [11, 12]. This study was a retrospective
5 review of cases of locally advanced NSCLC treated by induction chemoradiotherapy and
6 surgery at Okayama University Hospital between January 1999 and December 2018. A
7 total of 187 patients were included in this study. The inclusion criteria were an Eastern
8 Cooperative Oncology Group performance status of 0 to 1 and adequate functional
9 reserves of the major organs, as previously described [13]. Staging was performed
10 according to the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer TNM Staging
11 System for NSCLC, eighth edition [14]. The study protocol (No. 1055) was approved by
12 the Institutional Review Board of Okayama University Hospital. The requirement for
13 patient consent was waived due to the retrospective nature of the study and the patients
14 were informed of their right to opt out.

15

16 ***Induction chemoradiotherapy followed by surgery***

17 The details of trimodality treatment as initial therapy targeting a primary NSCLC tumor
18 have been described previously [8, 11, 15]. Briefly, most patients received cisplatin and
19 docetaxel as induction chemotherapy, and some patients received alternative
20 chemotherapy regimens. On the first day of chemotherapy, radiotherapy was initiated with
21 a planned total radiation dose of 40–46 Gy. Dose escalation up to 60 Gy was allowed
22 when tumors responded poorly. The surgical procedure after induction
23 chemoradiotherapy was decided on the basis of the disease extent before the start of
24 induction therapy. Although the preferred procedure was pulmonary lobectomy with

1 complete ipsilateral mediastinal and subcarinal nodal dissection, bilobectomy or
2 pneumonectomy was performed to achieve complete resection when necessary. The
3 patients received postoperative adjuvant therapy at the physician's discretion. After the
4 completion of trimodality treatment, the patients were followed up in accordance with our
5 follow-up regimen [8].

6

7 ***Management of pulmonary aspergillosis***

8 The diagnosis of CPA during the follow-up period was confirmed on the basis of the clinical,
9 laboratory, and radiographic findings, including testing for 1,3-beta-D-glucan and
10 galactomannan antigen, cultures, bronchoscopy, chest X-ray, and chest computed
11 tomography. After confirming the diagnosis of CPA, the patients were initially treated with
12 antifungal agents. In accordance with the guidelines for the treatment of CPA published
13 by the European Respiratory Society [1], after a careful risk assessment, surgery was
14 considered for improved disease control in patients whose CPA was refractory to medical
15 management.

16

17 ***Statistical analysis***

18 All statistical analyses were performed using the GraphPad Prism 7.03 software program
19 (San Diego, CA, USA). Overall survival was defined as the interval between the start of
20 induction therapy and the date of death or the last follow-up examination. The survival
21 rates were analyzed by the Kaplan–Meier method, and the log-rank test was used to
22 compare the differences between groups. P values of <0.05 were considered to indicate
23 statistical significance.

24

1 **Results**

2 ***Patient characteristics***

3 As shown in Table 1, six patients developed CPA after trimodality treatment for NSCLC.
4 All 6 patients were male ever-smokers and had been histologically diagnosed with
5 adenocarcinoma. All 6 patients underwent extended resection: combined resection in 4
6 patients, N3 nodal dissection in one patient (Case 4), and bilobectomy in one patient
7 (Case 6). The total number of resected lung segments was ≥ 4 in 5 patients. After surgery,
8 3 patients received adjuvant chemotherapy, and 4 patients developed radiation
9 pneumonitis.

10 Table 2 summarizes the details with regard to CPA. Five patients had cough and
11 fever, and 3 patients had hemoptysis. The intervals between the initial therapy for
12 NSCLC and the diagnosis of CPA ranged from 1.3 years to 9.9 years. Testing for 1,3-beta-
13 D-glucan and galactomannan antigen was positive in two patients each. *Aspergillus*
14 *fumigatus* was detected in 4 patients, and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* was detected in the
15 sputum culture of one patient (Case 2). It is noteworthy that in each patient computed
16 tomography showed consolidation in the single remaining lung or both lungs as well as a
17 cavity at the resection site. A fungus ball was demonstrated in 4 patients, and a
18 bronchopleural fistula was diagnosed in the other 2 patients, who were diagnosed with
19 empyema (Case 1 and 2). Cavernostomy with fenestration was initially performed in the
20 2 empyema cases, and one patient (Case 1) subsequently underwent completion
21 pneumonectomy. Completion pneumonectomy was performed as the initial surgery in the
22 patient (Case 3) who had no comorbidities (Fig. 1). A prompt diagnosis of CPA was
23 achieved in Case 4 during close follow-up of glucocorticoid tapering for radiation
24 pneumonitis, and CPA was subsequently successfully controlled with antifungal agents (Fig.

1 2). The 2 patients with bilateral CPA lesions (Fig. 3) were not considered to be candidates
2 for surgery and died of CPA. The 4 patients with a unilateral CPA lesion are still alive. The
3 overall survival rate of the CPA group was similar to that of the group without CPA after
4 trimodality treatment for NSCLC ($P=0.59$). It is noteworthy that no cancer recurrence or
5 death was observed among the NSCLC patients who developed CPA, which is an
6 indication of the importance of CPA control in improving the outcomes of trimodality
7 treatment.

8

9 **Discussion**

10 In this study we elucidated the characteristics of CPA that developed in patients who had
11 undergone surgery for locally advanced NSCLC after induction chemoradiotherapy and
12 the outcomes of patients with CPA after trimodality treatment. All patients who
13 subsequently developed CPA had undergone extended resection for NSCLC and had a
14 history of either adjuvant chemotherapy or radiation pneumonitis. CPA developed at the
15 resection site of all 6 patients, and the 4 patients whose CPA was localized in a remaining
16 lobe in a single lung at the time of the diagnosis were considered to be candidates for
17 surgery, which resulted in improved CPA control and long-term survival. To the best of our
18 knowledge, this is the first report describing CPA after trimodality treatment.

19 Trimodality treatment for NSCLC, which consists of chemotherapy, radiotherapy,
20 and surgery, may itself be a risk factor for CPA [2-6]. Adjuvant chemotherapy may further
21 increase the risk of developing CPA [2], and radiation pneumonitis may contribute to the
22 development of a destroyed lung, which is susceptible to aspergillus infection. In addition,
23 extended lung resection may lead to the compensatory overexpansion of the remaining
24 lobes, especially in the emphysematous lungs of ever-smokers, as was observed in this

1 study, and contribute to cavity formation in the pulmonary parenchyma. Furthermore,
2 treatment of lung infections and second primary cancer may prolong patient survival after
3 trimodality treatment for NSCLC [16]. In view of these factors, physicians should be aware
4 of CPA as a possible late complication after trimodality treatment for NSCLC.

5 The diagnosis of CPA requires a consistent appearance on computed tomography,
6 such as a cavity and fungus ball, which are direct evidence of *Aspergillus* infection, or
7 evidence of an immunological response to *Aspergillus* species and the exclusion of other
8 diagnoses [1]. No *Aspergillus* species were detected in 2 of our patients (Cases 2 and 4).
9 Because an antagonistic relationship has been shown to exist between *Aspergillus*
10 *fumigatus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* [17], in Case 2, in which a fungal infection was
11 histologically diagnosed based on the examination of the surgical specimen, the
12 pseudomonal infection may have resulted in a false-negative *Aspergillus* culture. In Case
13 4, the presence of a fungus ball and a positive galactomannan antigen test contributed to
14 the early diagnosis of CPA. An early diagnosis of CPA is required for effective treatment
15 to prevent the spread of CPA from one lung to the contralateral lung.

16 The localization of CPA in a single lung after NSCLC surgery at the time of the
17 diagnosis may be a key to the improved control of CPA after trimodality treatment for
18 NSCLC. Three patients with CPA in a single lung after NSCLC surgery underwent
19 successful surgery, including completion pneumonectomy. Another patient, whose CPA
20 remains well controlled with antifungal agents, would still be a candidate for surgery, even
21 if their condition deteriorated. Because pneumonectomy has been shown to provide
22 favorable results as a treatment for complex aspergilloma [18], completion
23 pneumonectomy may be a therapeutic option for operable CPA patients after trimodality
24 treatment for NSCLC. Survivors of NSCLC after trimodality treatment who have risk

1 factors for CPA might benefit from prophylactic antifungal therapy, which is routinely
2 administered to lung transplant recipients [19]. The further accumulation of cases of CPA
3 after trimodality treatment will be necessary for a more detailed evaluation.

4 In conclusion, careful follow-up is necessary to detect CPA as a late complication
5 after surgery for locally advanced NSCLC treated with induction chemoradiotherapy,
6 especially in ever-smoker patients who have undergone extended resection and have a
7 history of either adjuvant chemotherapy or radiation pneumonitis. The early detection and
8 diagnosis of CPA localized in a single lung after NSCLC surgery is critical to improving the
9 control of CPA with antifungal agents and surgery as well as long-term survival after
10 trimodality treatment.

11

12 **Compliance with ethical standards**

13 **Conflict of interest:** Shinichi Toyooka received research grants from Astellas Pharma
14 Inc., Chugai Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., and Taiho Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. Katsuyuki Kiura
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Table 1. Patient characteristics

No.	Age at the diagnosis of CPA (years)	Sex	Smoking history	Histology	Tumor location	c-Stage	Chemotherapy	Radiation (Gy)	Thoracotomy	Pulmonary resection	Combined resection	Lymph node dissection	Total number of resected lung segments	Pathological evaluation	Adjuvant chemotherapy	Comorbidities
1	47	Male	Ever	AD	Rt. S1	IVA, T4N2M1b(rib)	VNR	60	MS, T	RUL	Rt. clavicle, SVC, phrenic nerve, wedge of rt. S6	N2 level	3	Minor	Yes	Radiation pneumonitis
2	55	Male	Ever	AD	Lt. S1+2	IIIB, T4N2M0	CCDP+DOC	46	MS	LUL	Wedge of lt. S6	N2 level	5 or more	Major	Yes	Alcoholic chiritosis, Diabetes mellitus, Right pneumothorax
3	52	Male	Ever	AD	Lt. S6	IIB, T3N0M0	CCDP+DOC	46	PL	LLL	Wedge of lt. S1+2, chest wall	N2 level	4 or more	Complete	No	Radiation pneumonitis
4	73	Male	Ever	AD	Lt. S1+2	IIIA, T1cN2M0	CCDP+DOC	46	MS, T	LUL	None	N3 level	5	Complete	No	Radiation pneumonitis treated with glucocorticoid, Pulmonary venous thrombus
5	57	Male	Ever	AD	Lt. S1+2	IIB, T2aN1M0	CCDP+DOC	46	PL	LUL	Pulmonary artery	N2 level	5	Major	Yes	Left adrenal metastasis treated with surgery and chemotherapy 9 months after initial therapy
6	56	Male	Ever	AD	Rt. S4	IIIB, T3N2M0	CCDP+DOC	46	PL	RML, RLL	None	N2 level	7	Major	No	Radiation pneumonitis

AD adenocarcinoma, CCDP cisplatin, LLL left lower lobe, Lt left, LUL left upper lobe, MS median sternotomy, PL posterolateral thoracotomy, RLL right middle lobe, Rt right, RUL right upper lobe, S segment of the lung, SVC superior vena cava, T transverse thoracotomy, VNR vinorelbine

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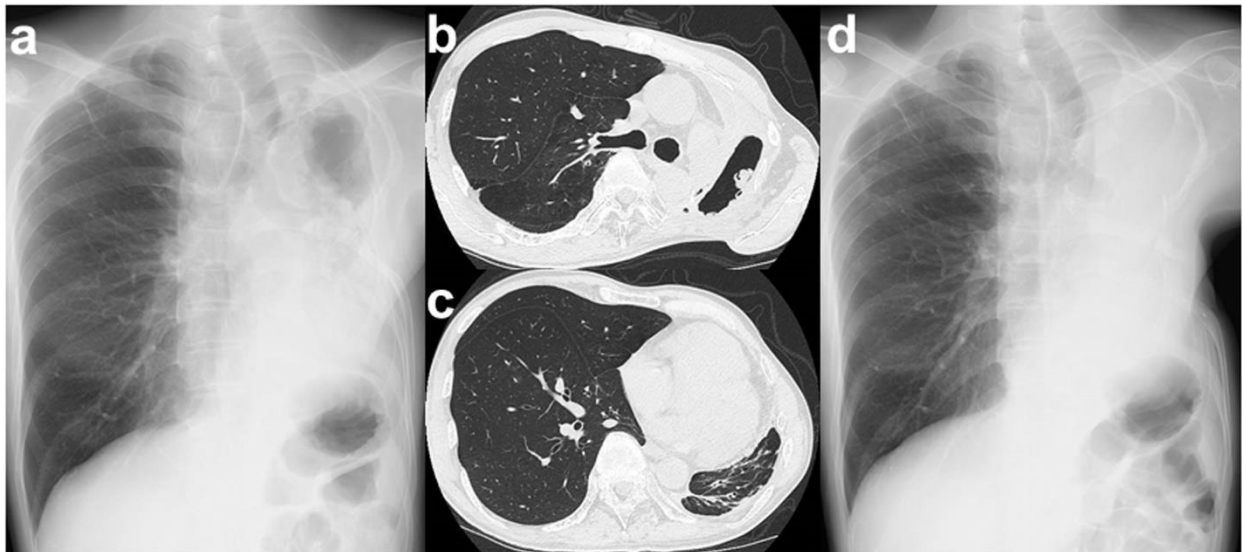
Table 2. Summary of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis

No.	Symptoms		Interval between initial therapy for NSCLC and the diagnosis of CPA (years)	Laboratory findings				CT findings				Outcome (years after initial therapy for NSCLC)				
	Fever	Cough		Sputum	1,3-beta-D-glucan (pg/mL)	GM	CRP (mg/dL)	Aspergillus species	Culture specimen	Consolidation	Cavity in the resection site		Fungus ball	Empyema with broncho-pleural fistula	Antifungal agents	Operative procedure
1	Yes	Yes	None	24.8	Negative 0.2	15.76	Aspergillus fumigatus	Pleural effusion	Unilateral	Yes	No	Yes	ITCZ, VRCZ, MCFG	Cavemostomy with fenestration followed by completion pneumorectomy	Fungus infection	Alive (13.3)
2	Yes	Yes	Purulent	<6.0	Positive 4.5	1.67	Negative	Sputum, BAL	Unilateral	Yes	No	Yes	ITCZ, VRCZ, CPFG	Cavemostomy with fenestration followed by muscle plombage	Fungus infection	Alive (12.2)
3	Yes	Yes	None	7.9	N/A	6.74	Aspergillus fumigatus	Sputum	Unilateral	Yes	Yes	No	ITCZ, VRCZ	Completion pneumorectomy with thoracoplasty	Fungus infection	Alive (5.0)
4	No	No	Bloody	<6.0	Positive 1.1	0.75	Negative	Sputum	Unilateral	Yes	Yes	No	ITCZ, VRCZ, MCFG	None	None	Alive (5.6)
5	Yes	Yes	Bloody	<6.0	Negative 0.1	16.76	Aspergillus fumigatus	BAL	Bilateral	Yes	Yes	No	VRCZ, MCFG	None	None	Dead (6.3)
6	Yes	Yes	Bloody	<6.0	Negative 0.3	2.94	Aspergillus fumigatus	Sputum	Bilateral	Yes	Yes	No	VRCZ, L-AMB	None	None	Dead (9.8)

BAL bronchoalveolar lavage, CPA chronic pulmonary aspergillosis, CPFG caspofungin, CRP C-reactive protein, CT computed tomography, GM galactomannan, ITCZ itraconazole, L-AMB liposomal amphotericin B, MCFG micafungin, NSCLC non-small cell lung cancer, VRCZ voriconazole

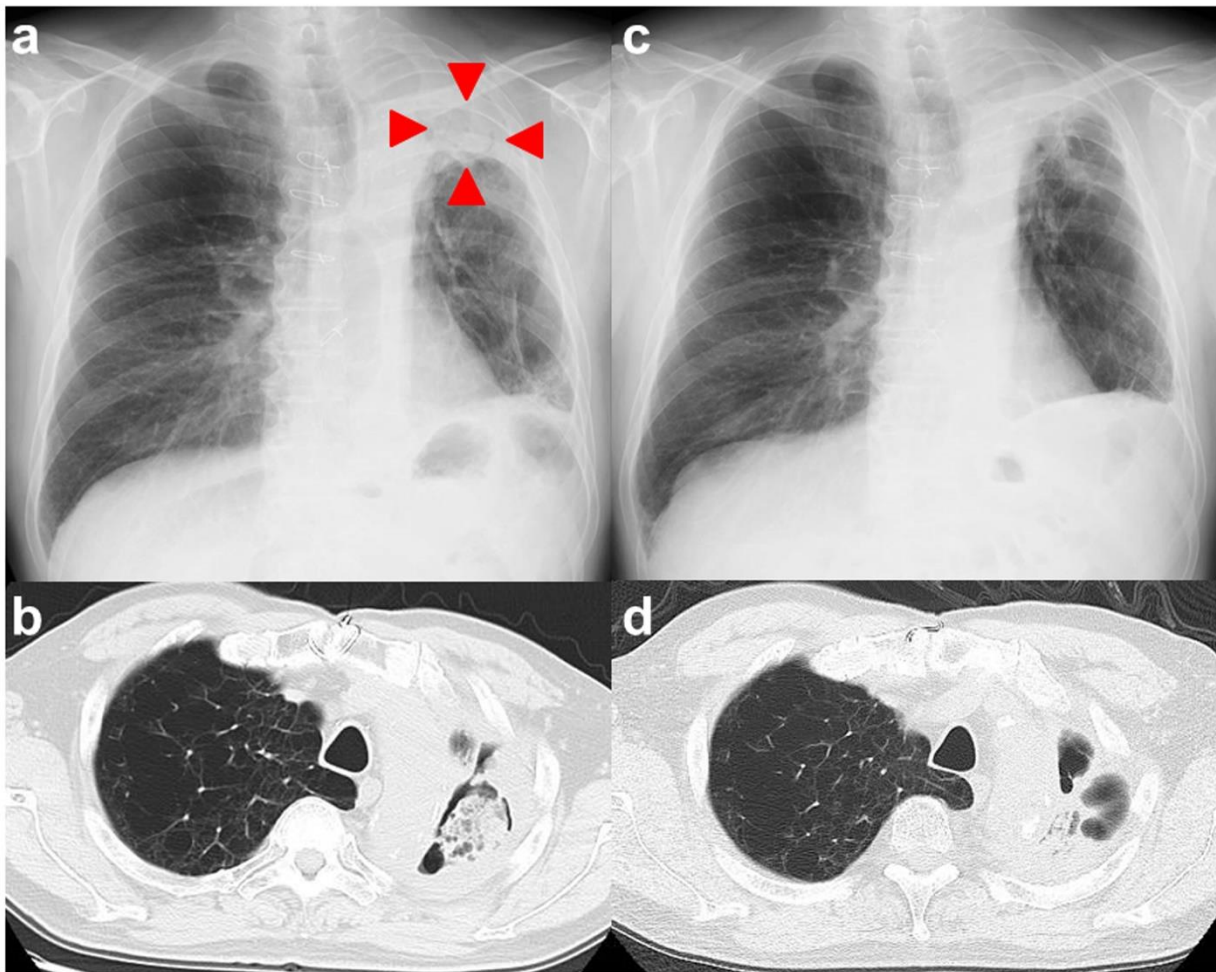
1 **Figure legends**

2 **Fig. 1** Representative diagnostic images of surgical cases of chronic pulmonary
3 aspergillosis in a single lung after trimodality treatment (Case 3). A preoperative chest X-
4 ray film (a) and computed tomography scan (b) showed a cavity and fungus ball in the
5 remaining left upper lobe. A postoperative chest X-ray film showed fluid accumulation in
6 the left post-pneumonectomy space (c).



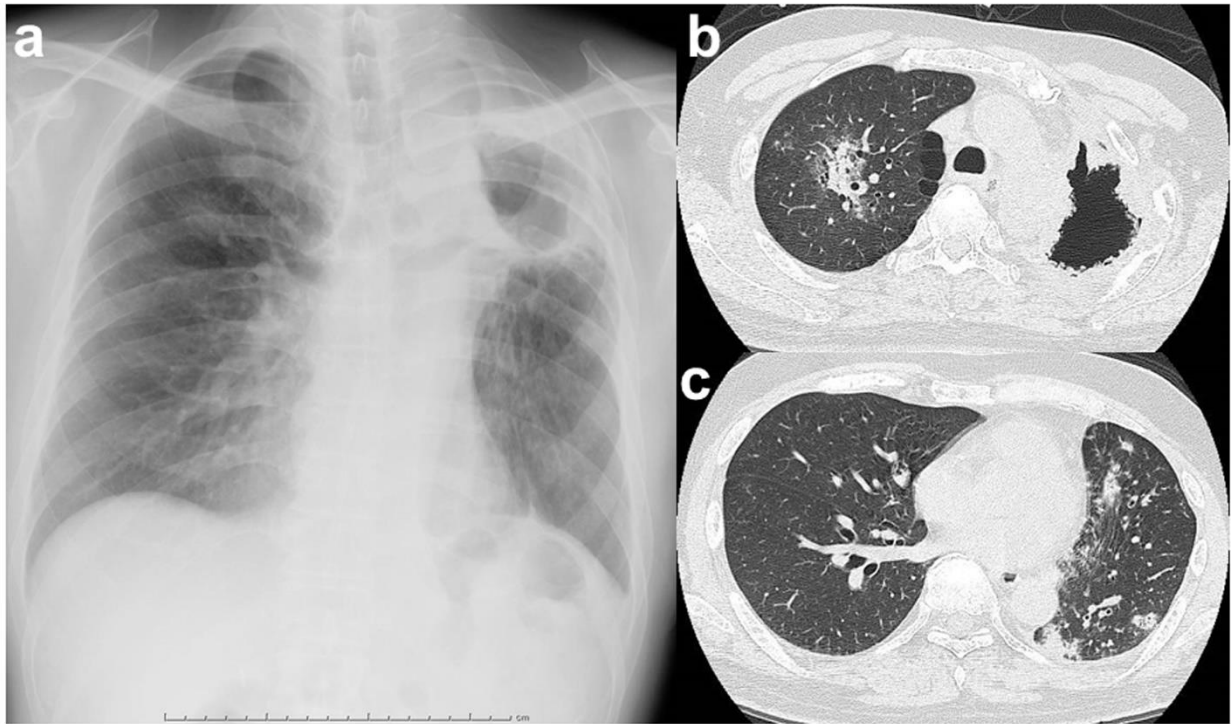
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1 **Fig. 2** A case of successful medical management of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis in a
2 single lung after trimodality treatment (Case 4). A chest X-ray film (a) and computed
3 tomography scan (b) revealed a cavity and fungus ball (arrow) in the left lower lobe
4 remnant. A chest X-ray film (c) and computed tomography scan (d) after antifungal therapy
5 showed that the fungus ball had shrunk.



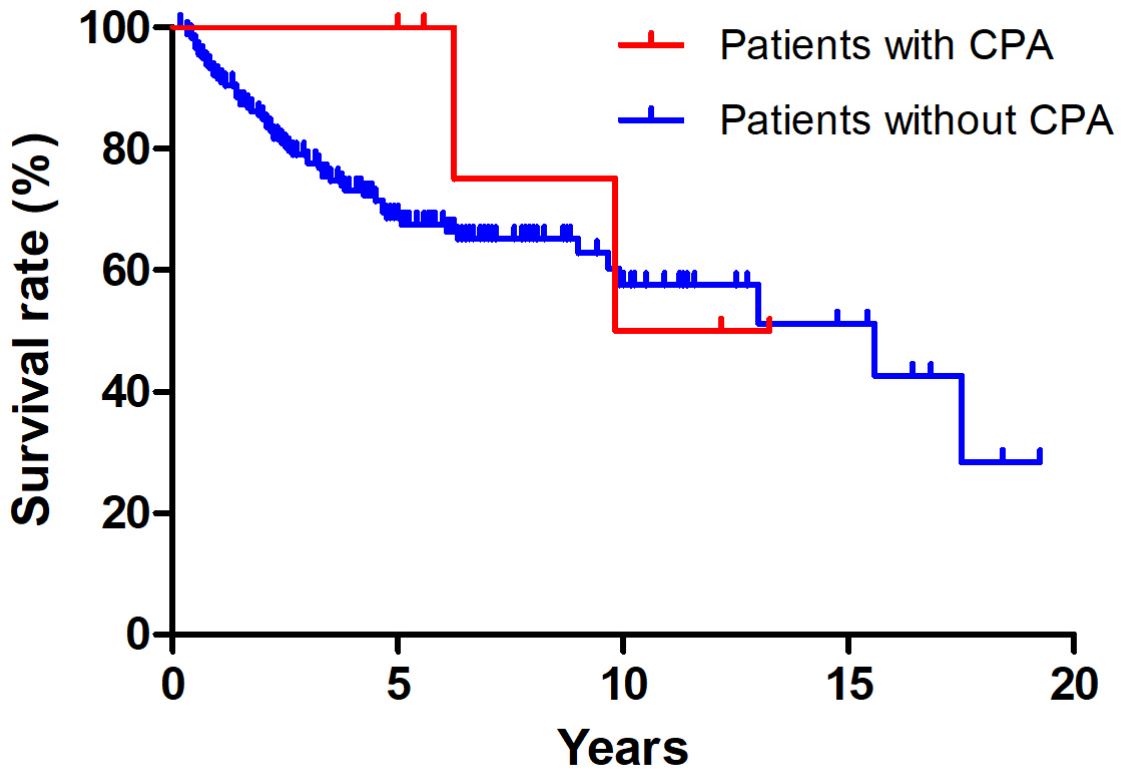
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1 **Fig. 3** Representative diagnostic images of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis in both lungs
2 (Case 5). A chest X-ray film (a) and computed tomography scans showed a cavity with a
3 thickened wall in the remaining lower lobe of the left lung (b) and consolidation in both
4 lungs (b, c).



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1 **Fig. 4** Survival of patients who developed chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA) and
2 those who did not develop CPA after trimodality treatment for locally advanced non-small
3 cell lung cancer. The survival rates of the CPA and non-CPA groups were comparable (10-
4 year survival rate, 50.0% vs. 57.6%, respectively, $P=0.59$).



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