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Clinical presentation includes AKI, CKD, renal infarction, uncontrolled hypertension, and allograft failure. Kidney biopsy is usually diagnostic, and the characteristic lesion is occlusion of cholesterol emboli in the lumina of arcuate, interlobular arteries, and glomeruli. The emboli of cholesterol crystals generally are deformed by the empty, biconvex, and needle-shaped clefts, appearing as “ghosts,” because cholesterol crystals usually dissolve during routine histologic preparation procedures. However, in frozen sections, the crystals are birefringent under polarized light and give positive histochemical reactions for lipids. Interlobular and arcuate arteries usually show perivascular polymorphonuclear and eosinophilic infiltration. Glomeruli can have normal morphology in the initial stage, but ischemic retraction of podocyte foot processes, focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), interstitial fibrosis, perivascular fibrosis around the occluded vessels, and tubular atrophy can be seen frequently due to ongoing ischemic injury in the later stages of the disease. Generally, immunofluorescence staining for immunoglobulins are negative. Kidney biopsy has a sensitivity of about 75%. Involvement of renal vasculature is patchy, and the diagnosis may be missed if not enough sections are examined. There is no specific therapy for cholesterol crystal embolism. Withdrawal of any form of anticoagulants, postponing aortic catheterization, and surgery should be considered first to avoid recurrence of cholesterol crystal embolism. The aim of treatment is to prevent the progression of tissue ischemia and further showering of cholesterol crystals or provide supportive care in the event of kidney failure.

References:
7. Li X, Bayliss G, Zhuang S: Cholesterol crystal embolism and chronic kidney disease. Int J Mol Sci 18: 1120, 2017 (Images and text provided by Mohankumar Doraiswamy, Division of Nephrology, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Columbus, Ohio; Sampaith Thiruvendhi, Division of Nephrology, Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio; and Anjali Satoskar, Division of Pathology, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Columbus, Ohio)