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Medical Imagery

Secondary syphilis presenting as rash and annular hyperkeratotic lesions

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Figure 1.



Figure 2.

A 36-year-old female was evaluated for several asymptomatic hyperkeratotic lesions on both palms and a non-pruritic rash on the trunk and limbs. Palmar lesions had appeared 3 weeks before presentation at our clinic and had increased progressively in size and number. The rash had started on the trunk 48 h after the appearance of the palmar lesions and had spread quickly to the extremities. There was no associated fever, lethargy, headache, or arthralgia. Physical examination revealed several annular red papules and plaques with hyperkeratotic and erosive surfaces located on both palms (Figure 1). No lesions were observed on the soles of the feet. A maculopapular rash was noted on the trunk and limbs (Figure 2). There was no visceromegaly, but generalized, non-tender lymphadenopathy was present.

Treponemal and non-treponemal test results confirmed the suspicion of secondary syphilis. On further questioning, the patient disclosed that she had had multiple sexual partners and had a history of gonococcal infection 6 months earlier, treated with ceftriaxone and doxycycline. She did not report the presence of preceding chancre or any genital ulcer. No antibodies to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) were detected. The patient was treated with an intramuscular injection of 2.4 million units of benzathine penicillin. Fine desquamation of all lesions was observed after 4 days of treatment, and resolution without scarring was achieved in 10 days.

Erosive lesions in secondary syphilis are rare. Such lesions may occur in the setting of leukemia maligna,¹ which is characterized

by fever, headache, and muscle pain. Our patient did not have any of these findings. Erosive secondary syphilis may also occur as a result of pustular and varioliform syphilides² or may be confused with precocious tertiary syphilis in HIV, but our patient did not have this type of lesion and was HIV-negative. However, erosive secondary syphilis has very occasionally been described in syphilis occurring in normal individuals.³ Physicians should keep this condition in mind as it is easily misdiagnosed.

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