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A case cluster of possible tissue invasive gonorrhoea

I read with great interest the report by Brook *et al* of a cluster of five cases of invasive gonococcal infection.¹ The authors apparently are unaware of a similar report published over twenty years ago.² We described a cluster in which a male patient with gonorrhoea infected seven of eight female contacts. Two other female partners could not be located. Among the seven infected women, two had disseminated gonococcal infection, four had pelvic inflammatory disease, and one had a Bartholin gland abscess. Three weeks after successful treatment of his urethritis, the male index case returned with disseminated gonococcal infection, having resumed intercourse with some of the same partners prior to their diagnosis and treatment.

In 1973 we lacked the ability to definitively prove that all of our patients were infected with the same strain of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. However, the epidemiologic circumstances made it clear that most or all of the patients in fact shared a common strain. We also cited several other reports from 1940 to 1972 that documented complications of gonococcal disease in couples or in mother-infant pairs.³⁻⁷ Collectively, these reports provided the first hint of variations in pathogenicity among gonococci.

There is nothing new under the sun (to coin a phrase)!

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Pseudomonas aeruginosa infections and HIV

Ali, *et al*¹ provide an interesting overview of their experience over a five year period with pseudomonas infections in HIV seropositive patients. Their report of an increase in the frequency of both pneumonic and septicaemic illness due to this organism concurs with other recent studies. Two points arise however, which merit further discussion. A report from this centre is incorrectly referenced² as illustrating that pneumonias due to *Staphylococcus aureus* and nosocomially acquired gram-negative organisms occur with increased frequency in patients with indwelling central venous catheters (CVCs). In fact, what the quoted study demonstrated was an increased frequency of pseudomonas as an isolate in the blood cultures of HIV seropositive patients with septicaemia (found in 19 of 52), especially those with indwelling CVCs; in only two of these patients was there evidence of a pseudomonas pneumonia. In the same study an apparent association with concurrent CMV infection was cautiously suggested, but the results of Ali *et al* do not support this.

More importantly however, their conclusion that the use of systemic pneumocystis prophylaxis is an independent risk factor for the development of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* pneumonia is erroneous and is not supported by the data provided. As the authors note, the affected patient group were all in the advanced stages of HIV disease with low CD4 counts. Not surprisingly therefore, the vast majority were also on *Pneumocystis carinii* (PCP) prophylaxis. However, without showing an increased risk for this group over a similarly severely immunosuppressed matched group not taking PCP prophylaxis (which for obvious reasons would be difficult to gather), this conclusion cannot be drawn. The low CD4 count, on the other hand, may be the relevant variable.

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Pneumococcal vaccine and HIV infection

Hellberg and colleagues¹ state "An association between cervical dyskaryosis, as well as the role of HPV in cervical cancer in situ and in invasive cancer, has been demonstrated." They quote Franceschi and colleagues² in support of this claim.

Sheppard and colleagues³ report the psychological distress of patients diagnosed with genital warts, for whom "... there is the fear of the link between genital warts and cervical cancer".

The paper which is frequently quoted as establishing a link between genital warts and cervical cancer by Franceschi and colleagues² did no such thing. These authors studied women attending a genitourinary medicine clinic, who had smears taken.

Among the women attending with genital warts there was a significant excess of smears showing "superficial dyskaryosis". None of these women had evidence of high grade CIN and certainly none of them had cervical cancer. All of the more severe cytological abnormalities occurred in women with trichomonas and gonorrhoea.

Having performed this very preliminary study, two of the authors returned to Italy where they conducted a more rigorous study⁴, which demonstrated no evidence of an association between genital warts and subsequent carcinoma in situ or invasive cervical cancer. Ever since discovering the second negative paper it has always amazed me how widely quoted is the first paper by these authors, whilst the second is almost universally ignored. Is it because the first paper was in a British journal and the second one in an American journal? Did the first paper have a "snappier title"? Or was it because the first paper confirmed people's prejudices and the second didn't? The original idea of an association was further refuted by our own work.⁵

Could it be that the myth of genital warts needs the same treatment as the other myth about cervical cancer—that "it has been known for 150 years not to occur in virgins"—finally debunked in 1991?⁶

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Carcinoma of the penis: A cluster of cases in young men

The authors of the recent article *Carcinoma of the penis in a HIV positive patient*¹ emphasise that this malignancy is rare in the immuno-competent population, especially in young men. Indeed, in 1989 (the most recent year for which figures are available)² there were only 45 notified cases in men under the age of 50 years in England and Wales.

It may therefore be of interest to report that recently, in the space of seven months, no fewer than four apparently immunocompetent men presented to this department with ulcerating lesions, clinically suspicious of malignancy. The men's ages ranged from 34 to 48 years. Although none had a HIV test, they were all heterosexual with no high risk factors for HIV infection. Two of the four had clinical appearances suggestive of lichen sclerosus, a third had a history of genital warts and all were uncircumcised.

Figure 1

Case 1 A 34 year old cohabiting heavy goods vehicle driver presented with a one year history of an itchy growth on his penis which the patient initially mistook for a wart. (He had a past history of penile warts at the age of 16 years). The growth enlarged progressively and ultimately split the foreskin causing pain. On examination there was an indurated, ulcerated, mass on the glans penis and prepuce (fig. 1).

Case 2 A 41 year old married company director gave a 2 month history of a rash on his penis which responded neither to clotrimazole cream nor hydrocortisone 1% cream. He was otherwise fit and healthy. On examination there was a marked balanoposthitis, and on the glans penis, there were areas of erythema, telangiectasia and depigmentation suggestive of lichen sclerosus. In addition, there was an indurated ulcer adjacent to the frenulum.

Case 3 A 41 year old married heavy goods vehicle driver was seen complaining of penile discomfort and blood stained discharge from under this foreskin over the previous 6 weeks. The patient volunteered that his foreskin had always been tight but that

recently he had been unable to retract it at all. On examination there was a phimosis, with evidence of lichen sclerosus, and an indurated warty lesion on the area of visible glans.

Case 4 A 48 year old unemployed married man had had difficulty in retracting his foreskin over the previous year. This had been associated with an offensive, occasionally blood stained discharge and dysuria. His general health had been good and there had been no weight loss. On examination there was a phimosis with an underlying ulcerated mass (fig 2). The glans penis and penile shaft were indurated and tender.

All the patients were referred to a consultant urologist and biopsy confirmed the diagnosis of squamous cell carcinoma of the penis in each case. All underwent surgery, with one lesion requiring total penectomy and radiotherapy.

It is interesting to speculate whether the incidence of penile malignancies in younger men is beginning to increase in parallel with the increase in vulval intraepithelial neoplasia in women, perhaps related to the increasing prevalence of HPV infection.

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NOTICE

State of the Art Issues in Genitourinary Medicine: a day on the interface between obstetrics, gynaecology and genitourinary medicine.

30 November, 1995; 9.15 am–5.30 pm at the Chelsea (Hotel), Knightsbridge, London.

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BOOK REVIEWS

All titles reviewed here are available from the BMJ Bookshop, PO Box 295, London WC1H 9TE. Prices include postage in the UK and for members of the British Forces Overseas, but overseas customers should add 15% to the value of the order for postage and packing. Payment can be made by cheque in sterling drawn on a UK bank, or by credit card (Mastercard, Visa, or American Express) stating card number, expiry data, and full name.

An Atlas of Differential Diagnosis in HIV Disease. (The Encyclopedia of Visual Medicine Series). By M C I Lipman, T A Gluck, M A Johnson. Parthenon Publishing Group. 1995. (Pp 139, £48) Carnforth, Lancs. ISBN 1-85070-474-0

This is really more than an atlas alone—its text gives a thorough and current account of various aspects of HIV, which, when combined with excellent illustration makes it a very informative read. It sets out to provide background to aid clinicians who have less experience of HIV infection and its manifestations, and as such fulfils its role well.

The introduction gives an up to date account of HIV infection and associated issues starting with acquisition and transmission of the virus and detailing cumulative numbers of HIV infected people on a world-wide scale. It stresses the importance of preventive measures in controlling world-wide spread of infection, and covers both the techniques and issues relating to HIV antibody testing. Much of the information is also represented graphically and diagrammatically, complementing the very readable text. This background information is followed by a description of presentation and follow up of an HIV infected patient—covering the natural history, monitoring, classification of disease and some symptom complexes.

Chapters cover: skin, respiratory, gastrointestinal, neurological, ocular, and malignant disease, and are followed by a limited bibliography subdivided by the same headings. The skin diseases are beautifully illustrated and common conditions covered in detail as well as some of the rarer manifestations (e.g. mycobacterial skin ulceration and bacillary angiomatosis) although candidal skin infection was missing. Much of the respiratory chapter is dedicated to the various manifestations of pneumocystis pneumonia, outlining its importance and changing presentation and incidence since the advent of primary prophylaxis. There are many X-ray and MRI illustrations together with corresponding microbiological appearances. This chapter also touches on cardiovascular involvement in HIV. Gastrointestinal manifestations also cover oral disease, wasting syndrome and highlights the likelihood of coexistent viral hepatitis. Both the neurological and ocular chapters are again well illustrated and case histories are given with the clinical pictures. Malignant disease focuses mainly on Kaposi's sarcoma with lymphoma and cervical intraepithelial neoplasia also pictured.

Figure 2