Oral involvement is uncommon in cutaneous T-cell lymphomas and usually associated with poor prognosis. The clinicopathological and immunohistochemical findings of 2 new cases are described along with a literature review. The first patient had a 10-year history of mycosis fungoides when she developed lesions in the oral tissues. She died 6 months later despite treatment. The immunophenotype was CD3\(^+\), CD4\(^+\), CD8\(^-\), CD30\(^+\). The second patient had a mycosis fungoides for 5 years when she developed lesions in the uvula and oropharynx. She was treated with polychemotherapy and she is alive 5 years after oral involvement. The immunophenotype was CD3\(^+\), CD4\(^-\), CD8\(^+\), CD30\(^-\). There are conflicting reports about the prognosis in the CD8\(^-\) phenotype. The present cases and the literature review seem to indicate that in oral involvement the CD8\(^-\) phenotype is not associated with a worse prognosis than the CD4\(^+\) subtype. However, it is necessary to study new cases to confirm this statement.

Key words: cutaneous T-cell lymphoma; oral mucosa; CD8\(^-\) phenotype.

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E. Gómez-de la Fuente, Servicio de Dermatología, Hospital Universitario 12 de Octubre, Ctra de Andalucía Km 5.400, ES-28041, Madrid, Spain

Mycosis fungoides (MF) is a cutaneous T-cell lymphoma that usually evolves through 3 classical stages: scaly patches, infiltrative plaques, and finally tumours. Lymph nodes and many other organs may be involved in the process but clinical oral involvement is an uncommon manifestation. Thus, Strois et al. reported a lower than 1% incidence of oral lesions in 824 patients with MF over a 25-year period (1). To the authors’ knowledge only 31 cases of oral involvement from cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (MF) have been reported in the English language literature (1 – 21). The clinicopathological and immunohistochemical features of 2 new patients are described here, along with a literature review.

CASE REPORTS

Case 1

A 45-year-old woman had a 10-year history of classic MF. She had received various treatments: PUVA, PUVA + interferon, methotrexate, topical carmustine, electron-beam therapy and photopheresis, with partial improvement. Nine years after the initial diagnosis she developed lymphadenopathies histologically diagnosed as Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and received polychemotherapy and autologous bone marrow transplantation, with a complete response. Eight months later, MF relapsed with numerous disseminated cutaneous plaques and tumoral lesions.

A bone marrow biopsy specimen at that time was normal. T-cell receptor rearrangement by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis of both peripheral blood and lesional skin biopsies (plaques and tumours) showed clonality. The complete blood cell count showed eosinophilia: 1 \times 10^9/l (normal <0.4 \times 10^9/l). The erythrocyte sedimentation rate was 40 mm/h. Biochemistry, thorax X-ray and thoracic computed tomographic (CT) scan were normal.

Treatment with oral corticosteroids, methotrexate and etoposide was started, but the disease progressed with development of lesions on her tongue, uvula and oropharynx (Fig. 1). The patient died 6 months later. A tongue biopsy specimen showed a dense corial and muscular diffuse infiltrate of large atypical lymphocytes with focal exocytosis. Numerous mitoses and eosinophils were present in significant numbers (Fig. 2). The phenotype of the tongue lesion, cutaneous plaque and tumour was CD3\(^+\), CD4\(^-\), CD8\(^-\), CD30\(^-\).

Case 2

In 1990 a 66-year-old woman developed erythematous plaques, papules and nodules on her head, trunk and legs. Biopsy specimens taken from the different lesions were similar and congruent with MF. She was treated satisfactorily with systemic interferon, but because of severe lymphopenia the treatment was substituted by topical carmustine with an almost complete response. In 1994 the patient noticed an ulcerated tumour on her leg and a painful enlarged uvula. Microscopically, the uvula surgical excision showed a malignant lymphoid proliferation composed of atypical large lymphocytes with irregular nuclei, prominent nucleoli and numerous mitotic figures.

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There was intense exocytosis and microabscess formation in the epithelium (Fig. 3). The phenotype was CD3$^+$, CD4$^+$, CD8$^+$, CD30$^+$. These histopathological and immunopathological features were similar to those seen in cutaneous lesions, although as in these 2 cases a higher number of large lymphocytes and a deeper involvement are frequent. These findings are usually present in tumoral cutaneous lesions of MF, and therefore is logical to find them in oral lesions because they represent an advanced stage of the disease.

A CD8$^+$ phenotype has been reported to have a poor prognosis in cases of MF with oral involvement (18, 26). However, there is not enough information in the literature because the CD8$^+$ immunophenotype has been only reported in 4 patients with MF and oral involvement (1, 14, 18). Moreover, the outcome of the reported cases has been equally poor in both the CD4$^+$ and CD8$^+$ phenotypes. A worse prognosis has not been demonstrated in classical MF with a predominantly CD8$^+$ phenotype (27–29). In the present cases the CD4$^+$ patient had a fatal outcome, while the CD8$^+$ patient remains alive 5 years later.

For these reasons, and despite the conflicting reports, the authors believe that in mucosal involvement the suppressor/cytotoxic (CD8) phenotype does not have a worse prognosis than the helper (CD4) subtype.

Of the reported cases more than 50% died within 1 year of the presentation of oral lesions and almost all died within 3 years. This survival rate is worse than that of patients with lymphadenopathy, erythroderma or tumoral lesions, and similar to that of patients with visceral involvement (21, 22). Therefore, oral involvement in MF must be considered a poor prognostic factor.
marker for poor prognosis and a manifestation of advanced disease.

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