
Accepted December 3, 1997.

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“Zosteriform” Lichen Planus: the Bizarre Consequences of a Misnomer

Sir,

Our dermatological nomenclature does not always reflect reality but, conversely, may sometimes create in our brain a world that does not exist. A bizarre example is “zosteriform lichen planus”, as described by Lutz et al. (1) in two patients with linear lichen planus. Although photographic documentation of one of these cases clearly shows that the arrangement of the disorder is not dermatomal but follows the lines of Blaschko, the mere term “zosteriform” makes the authors believe that the arrangement is indeed zosteriform, and that a search for varicella-zoster virus in the affected skin is a reasonable approach. Other authors similarly fixated with the erroneous term “zosteriform lichen planus” have likewise discussed the possibility of a Köbner phenomenon after herpes zoster infection (2 – 4).

It should be noted, however, that linear lichen planus virtually never shows a dermatomal arrangement but follows the lines of Blaschko (5). Compared to this disease, cases of true zosteriform lichen planus are extremely rare, and only such exceptional cases may be explained as a Köbner phenomenon induced by a preceding zoster eruption (6).

In conclusion, the arrangement of linear lichen planus is usually non-zosteriform, and the term “zosteriform” should be jettisoned from the description of such cases.

REFERENCES

Accepted December 22, 1997.

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Reply to the Letter by Happle

Sir,

We appreciate the comments of Dr. Happle. Despite Dr. Happle’s crusade, the term “zosteriform” lichen planus is firmly entrenched in the dermatologic literature and is not likely to disappear promptly. Irregardless of nosology, the unilateral/linear/Blaschko variant of lichen planus does not contain varicella or herpes simplex viral DNA, as our study demonstrated.

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