

pigmentation following a vascular pattern and occurs at sites of chronic heat exposure. Macular amyloid can also present with a hyperpigmented reticulate and rippled pattern over the trunk.

Our two cases illustrate an unusual side effect of treatment with benzoyl peroxide. Based on our review of the literature on the irritant nature of benzoyl peroxide, it appears that African-American patients, treated in areas other than the face, are at highest risk for this reticulate pattern of hyperpigmentation.

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## Acquired Curly Hair: A New Paraneoplastic Symptom?

Sir,

In our practice we occasionally encounter patients with a history of change in hair form, e.g. a puberty-related change from straight to curly hair or *vice versa*. There have also been reports of change from straight to curly hair as a side effect of treatment with etretinate (1) or isotretinoin (2). Here we report the case of a patient who developed curly hair shortly before a malignant disease was diagnosed.

#### CASE REPORT

The patient is a previously healthy man who at the age of 71 developed oesophageal cancer, the first symptom of which was epigastric pain. Oesophagogastrosocopy was performed, and biopsy showed the presence of a moderately differentiated squamous cell carcinoma. As exploratory thoracotomy revealed metastasis to mediastinal lymph nodes, the tumour was unresectable. Instead, the patient successfully underwent a 2-month course of radiotherapy combined with chemotherapy (cisplatin and fluorouracil), and has been recurrence-free for the past 4 years.

Two months before the onset of epigastric pain, the patient's hitherto straight hair became curly, especially at the sides and back. Not only the patient, but also his family noticed the change; his daughter envied his curly hair, and neighbours asked whether he had been having it permed. There were no changes in the colour or texture of the hair. The curly hair persisted for 7 months, from 2 months before the first symptoms of cancer became apparent until 1 month after completion of the concomitant radiotherapy and chemotherapy, when the hair once more became straight. During treatment he temporarily lost about 20% of his hair.

#### COMMENT

There are numerous cutaneous markers of internal malignancy, and a few associated hair symptoms are recognized.

For instance, the occurrence of hypertrichosis lanuginosa acquisita—the sudden appearance and rapid growth of long, fine, downy, whitish-yellow lanugo-type hair—has been reported in association with an internal tumour (3). Alopecia can occur in conjunction with malignant disease, though usually as a result of treatment; and changes in colour, shade, texture or curliness of the hair as it grows back again are well-known sequelae.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first reported case of acquired curly hair in conjunction with malignancy—the curliness developing shortly before diagnosis and disappearing soon after successful treatment. Since a patient might not always think to mention recent curling of the hair, and since curly hair *per se* is hardly an abnormal clinical finding, such a symptom may easily be missed.

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