Two decades later: a delayed red ink tattoo reaction

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DESCRIPTION
This tattoo belongs to a builder recently diagnosed with peripheral T-cell lymphoma. Six days after autologous bone marrow transplantation, while neutropaenic, the patient developed fever of unknown origin. During this period three of his tattoos, all inked before 1990, formed tender erythematous plaques overlying any areas of red ink. These lesions desquamated 3 days later (figure 1) and spontaneously resolved after the patient had engrafted and was no longer neutropaenic. Biopsy was declined by the patient. While acute red ink tattoo reactions are well documented, a case of a tattoo reaction with a delay of more than two decades has not been previously described.

Learning points
▸ Acute tattoo reactions are most commonly associated with red pigments.
▸ Fever of unknown origin, particularly in the context of neutropaenia, should prompt a thorough examination and consideration of infectious sources beyond the respiratory and urinary tracts.
▸ Tattooing can introduce atypical infectious agents.

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Figure 1  A delayed red ink tattoo reaction.