Geographical tongue induced by axitinib

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DESCRIPTION

A metastatic kidney cancer patient in his 50s presented with white, painless, patterned lesions on the dorsum of the tongue (figures 1 and 2). These well-demarcated lesions appeared within a few weeks of starting axitinib, an oral antiangiogenic agent. The lesions were asymptomatic, did not affect oral intake in any way and persisted for more than 18 months. This self-limiting condition is known as 'geographical tongue', or 'benign migratory glossitis'. The pathophysiology of these lesions remains to be fully elucidated.

Geographical tongue has been previously reported with other antiangiogenic agents such as bevacizumab, sunitinib and sorafenib.^{1 2} On a PubMed search, there were no previous publications reporting the incidence of these lesions with axitinib therapy. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first case report to describe these lesions in patients undergoing axitinib therapy. Our case report confirms that these intriguing lesions are a class effect of agents inhibiting vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) signalling pathway. Unlike two other case reports in the literature, where these lesions have been associated with altered taste sensation (dysgeusia), the lesions in our patient were completely asymptomatic.^{1 2}

These lesions need to be differentiated from the widely prevalent oral candidiasis in immunosuppressed patients with cancer. With the increasing use of antiangiogenic and VEGF pathway targeting agents in colon, breast, ovarian, gastric, pancreas and kidney cancers, many general physicians and general practitioners are likely to encounter these lesions in patients with cancer. These asymptomatic

Figure 2 Geographical tongue: lateral view.

lesions cannot be brushed or scraped away, however, they do not need any specific therapy and patients need reassurance only.

Learning points

- ▶ In patients with cancer presenting with patterned white lesions on tongue, consider geographical tongue in the differential diagnosis.
- ▶ Unlike the widely prevalent oral candidiasis in immunocompromised patients with cancer, the geographical tongue lesions cannot be brushed or scraped away.
- ▶ These asymptomatic lesions have a characteristic appearance and hence there is no need for biopsy confirmation; patients do not need any specific therapy and need reassurance only.

Figure 1 Geographical tongue: dorsal view.

Contributors SS diagnosed the case and co-wrote the draft. FB co-wrote and approved the draft.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent Obtained.

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