Dermoscopic signs of lichen planus

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Accepted 19 December 2015

DESCRIPTION

A 55-year-old woman presented with a 3-month history of violaceous, itchy, flat-topped papules located on her forearms (figure 1), trunk and legs. There was no history of drug intake.

The forearm lesions were studied with a handheld dermoscope (8 10; Heine Optotechnik, Germany) revealing yellow dots and Wickham striae (WS), surrounded by radial linear and dotted capillaries (figure 2). Mature lesions also revealed peripheral pigmented dots and diffuse scale distribution (figure 3). The diagnosis of lichen planus (LP) was considered after clinical and dermoscopic correlation, and confirmed histologically. Screening for hepatitis B and C was negative.

Dermoscopy is a non-invasive tool widely used in the diagnosis of skin tumours. Recently, its applicability also extended to the field of inflammatory skin disorders. LP is an idiopathic inflammatory disease of the skin and mucous membranes. Our report highlights the main characteristics of active LP. Vascular structures are the earliest dermoscopic signs of LP.

WS is the hallmark sign of LP and corresponds histologically to focal thickening of the granular layer. Several WS patterns have been described including circular, reticular, radial linear, globular, perpendicular and veil-like structureless forms. WS are mainly seen in the active stages and disappear after treatment, thus their presence could be considered as an activation marker.

Deep dotted hyperpigmentation is related to pigment in dermal melanophages and resists treatment.

Dermoscopic features of LP may be of precious aid to the clinical diagnosis, especially in discriminating between LP and lichenoid sarcoidosis, psoriasis, dermatitis and pityriasis rosea. It could also help early detection of treatment response.

Learning points

▸ Dermoscopy contributes to the early diagnosis of lichen planus (LP). Dermoscopic signs of active LP include Wickham striae (WS), vascular structures (especially red dots, radial capillaries) and hyperpigmentation (brownish diffuse or deeper dotted patterns).

▸ WS are considered pathognomonic of LP. However, their absence should not exclude the diagnosis. WS could be missing especially in treated LP or in particular forms of LP (LP pigmentosus, actinic LP).

▸ Dermoscopy could be useful for the evaluation of treatment outcome in patients with LP, as vascular structures and WS tend to disappear under appropriate treatment. However, deep dotted pigmentation corresponds to the presence of pigment in dermal melanophages and is typically resistant to treatment.
Contributors NL wrote the first draft of the manuscript. YM managed the literature searches and analyses. MJ and FZ revised the manuscript. All the authors contributed to and have approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent Obtained.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

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