A rare presentation of a rare disease

A 29 year old woman presented to the gynaecology services with a history of cervical smear cytology and punch biopsy showing human papillomavirus related changes, associated with moderate dyskaryosis. She had undergone laser loop excision biopsy of the transformation zone (LLETZ) two years before for previous abnormal smears. This showed moderate dysplasia in the ectocervical epithelium, but was otherwise unremarkable. A second laser loop biopsy was performed. This was received in the histopathology department in two pieces, 1.5 and 1.2 cm in greatest dimension, respectively. On microscopic examination, focal mild squamous dysplasia was identified in each piece. However, in addition to this numerous eosinophils were seen in the cervical stroma. On close inspection, these were admixed with histiocytic cells, the nuclei of which displayed a degree of atypia, with a convoluted shape (see figs 1 and 2 for low and high power views, respectively). Immunohistochemistry revealed these cells to be positive both for S100 protein (fig 2) and CD1a (fig 3). A diagnosis of Langerhans cell histiocytosis (LCH) was made.

Following this diagnosis, the previous cervical smears were reviewed, but apart from the dyskaryotic squamous cells reported previously, no other abnormal cells were identified.

No case has been found in the literature in which the diagnosis of cervical LCH was made as an incidental finding in a LLETZ biopsy, as in our present case.

In summary, our present case is of interest in that it draws attention to a disease with potential systemic importance, which is not only rare in itself, but only very rarely presents with a cervical lesion.

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References

Sputum cytology: an unsatisfactory test?

After the correspondence of Burton and colleagues and the Royal College of Pathologists’ working group guidelines on the use of sputum cytology as a diagnostic test, we reviewed sputum figures for our department for the period 1998–2001. The results are shown in table 1. These figures confirm that a high proportion of samples are unsatisfactory (30%), although our diagnostic rate (8%) for malignancy was higher than that of Burton et al., who identified only a solitary carcinoma.

In addition, although most of the unsatisfactory specimens were submitted by non-respiratory physicians, it was this group that yielded the high pick up rate of malignancy (73%). We consider from these results that sputum cytology still has a place in the investigation of patients with suspected lung malignancy who are unsuitable for bronchoscopy. We agree however that careful selection of patients and correct collection of adequate lower tract material are essential. Although sputum sampling is thought of as a relatively quick, easy, and cheap investigation, it is labour intensive for pathology laboratory and medical staff to prepare and examine. In this present climate of pathology staff shortage, we agree that the use of this test should be restricted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Sputum data for our department for the period 1998 to 2001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benign</td>
<td>394 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cytological atypia</td>
<td>82 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malignant</td>
<td>58 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>238 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>772 (100%)</td>
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</table>
and the application of corticosteroids he died of a treatment resistant asphyxia with respiratory acidosis. Laboratory examination revealed polyplobula with 0.5% blasts in addition to 4% myeloid precursor cells at that time. Nasopharyngeal, laryngeal, and oral mucosae appeared to be extensively swollen at necropsy. Both subendocardial pectinei in the left outflow tract and cerebral oedema were observed. The spleen was moderately enlarged (16 cm). Microscopical examination of the laryngeal, pharyngeal, and oral mucosae revealed dense predominantly perivascular, factor VIII, glycoprotein C, and myeloperoxidase positive haemopoietic cell infiltrates—extramedullary haemopoiesis (fig 1). Haemopoietic cells also infiltrated the neck lymph nodes, the spleen, and the liver, in addition to the pulmonary interstitium, even the alveolar septa. Postmortem histological examination revealed a 95% cellularity with moderate fibrosis and 1% CD34 positive blasts. Asphyxia caused by treatment resistant respiratory insufficiency on the background of laryngeal and interstitial pulmonary infiltration by PV. Haemopoietic cell infiltrates—extramedullary haemopoiesis was recognized as the cause of death. Both factors impaired external and internal respiration, perturbing ventilation and gas diffusion. Concerning adequate treatment in such circumstances, a good response to local radiotherapy has been described in one less dramatic case. Clinicians should be aware that PV can progress to an uncontrollable generalised disease and infiltrate the respiratory organs.

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Figure 1 Extramedullary haemopoietic infiltration of the laryngeal submucosa consisting of megakaryocytes, myelopoietic cells, and erythropoietic cells. Original magnification, x400.
BOOK REVIEWS

Essentials of Anatomic Pathology

What is the best format to store and transmit information? With the development of electronic storage media and the Internet, paper is not always the first choice but even if it is then there are other decisions to be made. Will the book be illustrated? Will it be written in fully expanded grammatical prose or will some information be contained in lists and tables? How will it be indexed? What degree of cross referencing will be included?

The authors of this textbook have taken the unusual step of producing a large (893 page) multi-author text on anatomic pathology with no illustrations and all the text presented as succinct bulleted lists. Because I come from the “picture is worth a thousand words” school of information presentation and assimilation, I was initially sceptical of this approach, but I spent some time investigating the usefulness of this format.

The book is divided into general pathology and organ systems. Each organ chapter is divided into the usual categories of congenital anomalies, inflammatory, and neoplastic conditions. Each condition has its features listed under headings such as clinical, macroscopic, microscopic, immunohistochemistry, electron microscopy, and differential diagnosis. However, these are pure lists with very little explanatory text. Any technical description of a histology appearance—for example, pineal or medullary or nuclear pseudoinclusions—will send trainee pathologists scurrying to a book that does contain a picture. Any list of immunohistochemical reactions given as only positive or negative sent me to other sources of information for the pattern of staining and the percentage of specific tumours that did or did not give a positive reaction. I discovered several anomalies in the text that required further explanation. Ductal intraepithelial of the breast is presented as though it is the universally accepted system of classification of epithelial proliferations in the breast. The reporting of oestrogen receptor status in breast cancer is said to be positive if greater than 10% of nuclei are positive, with no reference to the more sophisticated and widely used McCarty H score. There is no mention of Her 2 assessment in breast cancer or c-kit in gastrointestinal stromal tumours of the oesophagus and stomach (it is mentioned as a diagnostic immunohistochemical stain in the intestinal chapter). Somewhat surprisingly, this book does not have an index so that information can only be found through the contents list at the start of each chapter. Originally the best intentions of the authors of this book I cannot find any use for it within a diagnostic histopathology laboratory for either consultant or trainee pathologists. The absence of illustrations, the list format of the text, and the absence of an index mean that there are a multitude of more accessible and useful sources of this information.

Leucocyte Typing VII

This book is the edited proceedings of the seventh conference or international workshop on white cell differentiation antigens held in Harrogate UK in June 2000. Although originally confined to white cells like Topsy these meetings have grown to encompass many other related cell types, such as dendritic cells endothelial cells, platelets, and red blood cells. Originally these meetings involved a wide range of interests from the basic science of the molecules through to their practical applications. Over the years, this has changed slowly towards the more scientific end of the spectrum and this is reflected in the contributions to this volume. In some ways it seems a little odd that pathologists, who as a group must be the biggest users of CD reagents, are little represented now at these meetings. I remember hearing a senior British pathologist, a most eminent immunocytologist, being asked if he was attending the third or fourth meeting. Replying in the negative he cheerfully asserted that when the book arrived it would contain all he needed to know.

Well, the book of the seventh has arrived so what does it hold for pathologists? First, I don’t think one is meant to attempt to read it. This is a heavyweight tome of nearly a thousand pages. It is very well laid out in 17 sections and has an excellent index, so it is no trouble to use it as a work of reference as and when needed. In particular there is a very useful summary guide to many CD antigens at the end. Every time I used a new antibody, obtained an unusual result, or read something new I looked up this section. For those CDs covered the summary was usually good. It is a pity that it is not complete because it detracts from the comprehensiveness of this section as a reference. The chapters in the individual sections are well laid out and edited. The coverage and the detail available depends upon the individual contributions to the conference.

In summary, this is a good reference to the most recent CD conference. It is also probably the most up to date guide to these molecules and has many aspects that are of interest and use to practising pathologists. However, it is not a comprehensive work of reference and should not be bought in the hope that it could fulfill this task.

Biochemical Investigations in Laboratory Medicine
Bart’s Endocrine Protocols

I was considering buying this book but to my delight a gratis copy arrived on my desk to review. But would it have been worth purchasing?

The book, published in the form of a glossy surfaced ring binder, presumably for hands on laboratory use, gives diagnostic algorithms and protocols for various biochemical dynamic tests. Competitors would possibly include Algorithms in Chemical Pathology, by M Crook, Butterworth-Heinemann and The Bart’s Endocrine Protocols by PJ Trainer and M Besser, Churchill-Livingstone. Not everyone will necessarily agree with the algorithms described by the authors. I found some possibly a little too simplistic but they nevertheless cover a range of conditions likely to be encountered by the hospital laboratory.

I found the book particularly useful regarding non-endocrine tests, such as the investigation of renal tubular acidosis or renal calculi. However, if there is a next edition then updating and clarification of some of the dynamic tests will be necessary—for example, oral glucose tolerance tests will need to include impaired fasting glucose.

At under 200 pages this was an easy and fruitful read. It would be a useful book for the chemical pathology department to have, close to hand, to help with those difficult queries. In response to my initial question this is a book worth buying for the clinical laboratory; although a little pricey at £24.

M Crook