CASE REPORT

Mucinous metaplasia of the vulva in a case of lichen sclerosus. A case report
E Rakha, C Mayne, L Brown

Mucinous metaplasia of the genital area is a rare condition characterised by the emergence of mucin containing cells in stratified squamous epithelium. This report describes a unique case of benign mucinous metaplasia of the vulva associated with lichen sclerosus in a 60 year old woman. Histopathology revealed cervical type metaplasia with otherwise typical lichen sclerosus. This report discusses the pathogenesis and differential diagnosis of mucinous epithelium.

A 60 year old woman presented with a few months history of postcoital bleeding and pruritis vulvae. Physical examination revealed a white raw area 12 mm in diameter located on the left labium major and extending into the vaginal introitus. A biopsy was taken and histological examination showed lichen sclerosus. However, the most unusual aspect of this case was that the stratified squamous epithelium was replaced by a stratified epithelium, the superficial layers of which were represented by columnar cells with multivacuolated mucin containing cytoplasm. There was no nuclear atypia (fig 1). Mild acute inflammatory changes were also present, probably secondary to excoriation. Mucin laden cells in the epithelium stained violet with diastase periodic acid Schiff and Alcian blue at pH 2.5, indicating the presence of neutral and acid mucins (fig 2). These cells also stained positively for CA19.9, oestrogen receptor, and carcinoembryonic antigen. The cells also showed focal positivity for cytokeratin 7 and negative staining for cytokeratin 20, indicating endocervical type mucinous metaplasia.

DISCUSSION

Mucinous cells are not a normal component of the skin. The differential diagnosis of mucin containing cells in the epidermis of the vulva includes the following: cutaneous in situ and invasive squamous cell carcinoma with mucinous metaplasia, extramammary Paget’s disease,1 mucinous syringometaplasia,2 mucinous papulosis,3 and epidermotropic metastasis. These must, in their turn, be distinguished from superficial spreading melanoma.

Lichen sclerosus is a well recognised common inflammatory dermatosis of unknown aetiology, which affects both sexes, but is most commonly seen in the vulva in women of any age.4 There seems to be a higher risk that lichen sclerosus may be associated with vulval carcinoma.5 An association with mucinous metaplasia has not been reported to date.

“Lichen sclerosus is a well recognised common inflammatory dermatosis of unknown aetiology, which affects both sexes, but is most commonly seen in the vulva in women of any age”
Take home messages

- We report a rare case of benign mucinous metaplasia of the vulva associated with lichen sclerosus in a 60 year old woman
- Histopathology revealed endocervical type metaplasia with otherwise typical lichen sclerosus
- The histogenesis of mucinous metaplasia of the genital area is unknown, but it probably represents a non-specific reactive process
- The association with lichen sclerosus is probably fortuitous or may be a further indication of longterm external damage or chronic inflammation

Authors’ affiliations
E Rakha, L Brown, Department of Histopathology, University Hospitals of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 5WW, UK
C Mayne, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University Hospitals of Leicester

The patient gave her informed consent for this case report to be published

Correspondence to: Dr L Brown, Department of Histopathology, University Hospitals of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 5WW, UK; laurence.brown@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Accepted for publication 24 March 2005

REFERENCES