

## CASE REPORTS

### DELUSIONAL PARASITOSIS IN LEPROSY

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#### SUMMARY

*A patient with leprosy along with delusional parasitosis is described. Neuritic manifestations of leprosy appear to have a triggering effect in the development of delusions.*

Delusional parasitosis is an uncommon condition and has occasionally been found to be associated with systemic conditions like pellagra, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, cerebrovascular disease, disseminated sclerosis, severe renal disease and temporal lobe epilepsy (Munro, 1980; Rook et al, 1986; Sheppard et al, 1986). We report a case of leprosy with delusions of parasitosis.

#### CASE REPORT

A 62-year-old male presented with a six month history of itching on scalp and right knee, which he attributed to infestation by insects. On examination by a dermatologist, he had hypopigmented erythematous and anaesthetic plaques on the right knee and thickened peripheral nerves. Severe excoriations due to scratching, were present on the forehead. Skin biopsy confirmed the diagnosis of tuberculoid leprosy and the patient was started on treatment for leprosy. Psychiatric examination revealed increased psychomotor activity, anxiety and elaborate delusions of being infested by small insects. No other psychopathology was detected. Nervous system examination was normal. Patient was started on Pimozide (4-6 mg/day) to which he responded. Hemogram, urine examination, ECG, CT Scan (head) were within normal limits.

#### DISCUSSION

In leprosy, neuritic manifestations such as localized paraesthesia, hypohesia, shooting pains and pruritus are usually present in early stages (Jopling et al, 1986). In our patient these symptoms seem to have triggered off the

delusion of parasitosis. The exact mechanism of the evolution of the delusional system in this disorder is not known. One hypothesis is that these patients suffer a profound breakdown in their ability to discriminate between normal and abnormal somatic perceptions and the delusion may be mediated by endogenous dysfunction in the limbic system. This dysfunction may be the result of a pathological over activity of the dopaminergic system as evidenced by the efficacy of the specific dopamine antagonist, pimozide (Munro, 1980). Leprosy is essentially a disease of peripheral nerves and does not involve the central nervous system (Jopling et al, 1986). In our patient, neuritic manifestations appear to have had a role in triggering the delusional system.

#### REFERENCES

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