

Are atypical presentations of leprosy are on the rise? :A 1-year prospective study from a tertiary referral center, India

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"It is possible that leprosy be eradicated without us knowing all its secrets, but it is also possible that it will not be eliminated just because we do not know it the way we should"-Prof.Opromolla

Introduction:

Leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease which affects multiple organs and thus presents with myriad of clinical as well as serological manifestations. Though we deal with new cases of leprosy every week, we were surprised to see many cases of leprosy with unusual presentations, which led to diagnostic dilemma.

Methods

We studied all patients suspected of having leprosy over a one-year period (2017-18) after taking their written consent. Those who have already taken multidrug treatment for leprosy were excluded. Thorough dermatological examinations and later skin biopsy and/or slit skin smears were performed to confirm the diagnosis of leprosy.

Results:

A total of 127 patients were confirmed to have leprosy. Borderline tuberculoid (BT, n=25) and polar leprosy i.e. tuberculoid (TT, n=24) contributed maximum number of cases. Interestingly, erythema nosodsum leprosum was the only initial manifestation in 18 cases. Surprisingly, 32

cases were initially presented with atypical cutaneous and/or systemic features, leading to misdiagnosis for connective tissue diseases (n=8), psoriasis (n=7), various eczemas (n=5), vasculitis (n=4), neurologic disorders (n=4), skin tumors (n=2) and angioedema of lips (n=2). More commonly borderline leprosy (n=12) and tuberculoid leprosy (n=8) patients were misdiagnosed for one of these diseases. Most of the referrals came from rheumatologist (n=12) and neurologist (4).

Conclusion:

Though India seems to have achieved elimination of leprosy in 2005, new cases of leprosy are still emerging and atypical forms of leprosy are also on rise, which was highlighted in this study. Atypical manifestations of leprosy not only delay the diagnosis and treatment, but also pose significant danger to the community at large.