Newly Described Features Resulting From High-Magnification Dermoscopy of Tinea Capitis

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Tinea capitis is a common fungal infection, especially among children. The diagnosis is based on results of direct microscopic examinations and mycological cultures of skin scrapings. Recent studies have reported “comma hairs” as a typical dermoscopic feature of tinea capitis observed at low magnification (×10). The aim of this study was to evaluate the dermoscopic aspects of tinea capitis at high magnification (×150) and its diagnostic role.

Observations

Five children (2 boys and 3 girls; aged 4-10 years) with multiple scaly patches of alopecia underwent scalp dermoscopy, direct microscopic examinations, and mycological cultures of skin scrapings. Using low magnification (×30), typical comma hairs, “Morse code-like” hairs, and “zigzag” hairs were observed. When using high magnification (×150), additional features were horizontal white bands that appear as empty bands that are likely related to localized areas of fungal infection. These horizontal white bands are usually multiple and may cause the hair to bend and break. We also identified a new dermoscopic feature consisting of translucent, easily deformable hairs that look weakened and transparent and show unusual bends; they are likely the result of a massive fungal invasion involving the whole hair shaft. Direct microscopic examination showed fungal infection and results of mycological culture were positive for Microsporum canis in all cases.

Discussion

The standard diagnostic approach for tinea capitis is based on 2 steps. The first is skin scraping, followed by observation with potassium hydroxide that will demonstrate the presence of septate branching hyphae. The second step is to grow the col-
lected scales in a Sabouraud dextrose agar medium to identify the causative agent. Both direct observation and mycological culture of skin scrapings consume time and money; simple, direct, and rapid methods are desirable. In our study, we evaluated 5 patients suspected to have tinea capitis using low- and high-magnification dermoscopy. Visualization at high magnification revealed previously unreported findings not visible at low magnifications. The horizontal white bands observed, at low magnification in the Morse code-like hairs (whose frequency and specificity have not been reported to our knowledge), at higher magnification appear as empty bands that are likely related to localized areas of fungal infection (Figure 2A). They are usually multiple and represent “locus minoris resistentiae” that may cause the hair to eventually bend (Figure 2B), thus configuring the zigzag hairs, and break (Figure 2C). In our experience, bent hairs correlate with the presence of horizontal white bands. At higher magnification, we also identified a new dermoscopic feature consisting of translucent, easily deformable hairs (Figure 2D). These hairs are different from the surrounding ones, have no horizontal white bands, and look weakened and transparent, showing unusual bends; they are likely the result of a massive fungal invasion involving the entire length of the hair shaft.

Interestingly, we saw 2 patterns of invasion. One was characterized by the presence of empty bands, which may be the cause of early hair breakage, and the other by a massive parasitation that appeared in the entire length of the hair shaft, with no empty bands, as well as signs of early breakage. In all patients, results of a mycological culture of skin scraping samples were positive for *Microsporum canis*.
Conclusions

The identification of additional findings using higher-magnification dermoscopy, which is achievable using a dedicated videodermoscope (rather than a handheld dermoscope connected to a digital camera provided with a zoom lens), may enhance the diagnosis of tinea capitis and be of help to better understand some pathogenetic mechanisms. Further studies, however, are needed to confirm our preliminary findings.

NOTABLE NOTES

The Evolution of Dermatology Grand Rounds
From Alibert to Osler

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Grand rounds (GR) is one of the key components of dermatology training and continuing education. In a recent study, GR was found to be among the most popular and well-run educational activities in dermatology programs across the United States. One of the earliest documented dermatology lectures to large groups of physicians and trainees are those of Baron Jean-Louis Alibert (1768-1837). Alibert is known as one of the fathers of French dermatology and was the first physician to study skin disease at the Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris. Alibert became very well known for his teaching, and, in addition to trainees and young physicians, esteemed and experienced physicians would often attend his clinic to learn from him. He would teach large groups of people in the Pavillon Gabrielle at the Hôpital Saint-Louis, but eventually his audience outgrew this space. He moved his lessons outside under the lime trees next to the Pavillon Gabrielle and taught in the fashion of Greek philosophers. He hung paintings of various skin diseases from the lime trees and called patients, wearing signs indicating their diagnoses, up to the wooden platform from which he presented the patients in a theatrical manner to his audience.

Grand rounds as we know them today in the United States originated in internal medicine with Sir William Osler at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in the late 19th century. Osler and other highly respected clinicians conducted bedside rounds to teach trainees and other physicians, in keeping with the idea that exposure to patients was the best strategy for effective education. As the group of individuals attending these sessions became larger, it was no longer possible to conduct rounds at the bedside. Similar to Alibert, Osler began teaching in a venue that could accommodate a larger audience and conducted rounds in an amphitheater or auditorium.

REFERENCES


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