LACRIMAL CANALICULAR DUCT SCARRING IN PATIENTS WITH LICHEN PLANUS

Naomi K. Webber, MBBS, BSc, MRCPCH; Jane F. Setterfield, MBBS, BDS, FRCP; Fiona M. Lewis, MBBS, MD, FRCP; Sallie M. Neill, MBBS, FRCP

Background: Lichen planus (LP) is a mucocutaneous inflammatory disease that affects multiple sites, including the skin, oral cavity, vulva, and vagina and can result in scarring and stricture formation. It has also been shown to cause lacrimal canalicular blockage in a series of patients attending an ophthalmology clinic. We describe a cohort of women with vulvovaginal LP who also had signs of lacrimal canalicular scarring on examination.

Observations: We report 9 cases of LP with scarring of the conjunctiva around the lacrimal ducts. Seven of 9 women had symptoms of epiphora, and in 2 women lacrimal canalicular scarring was an incidental finding. Seven of 9 cases were diagnosed by an ophthalmologist. All women had biopsy-proven LP at 1 mucocutaneous site each. Seven of 9 women had vulvovaginalgingival syndrome, which is a subgroup of severe erosive LP.

Conclusions: Given the strong association between erosive mucocutaneous LP and multisite scarring sequelae, it is not unexpected that ocular inflammation may lead to lacrimal duct stenosis. We believe that this complication has been underreported among patients with LP and that an ophthalmological history and examination of the punctum of the lacrimal duct should be sought, especially in patients with the erosive subtype of LP.

ing in conductive deafness and esophageal involvement that leads to strictures and dysphagia.\(^3,4\) It has a slight female predominance (1.4:1) and affects 1% to 2% of adults.\(^5\) In most patients, it is self-limiting and follows a benign course. The mucosal variant of LP may involve the oral and genital mucosa and is characterized by sores and erosions. Scarring results in fibrous bands in the buccal mucosa, leading to a reduced vestibular sulcus and limitation of the oral aperture.\(^6\) In our series, 7 of 9 women had VVG syndrome, which is a severe subtype of LP characterized by erosions or desquamation of vulval, vaginal, and gingival mucosa, with predilection for scarring and stricture formation.\(^6,7\) The pathogenesis of LP is unclear, but it is believed to be caused by specific and nonspecific immunological mechanisms. Specific mechanisms probably include antigen presentation by basal keratinocytes and antigen-specific T cells that are cytotoxic to keratinocytes, whereas nonspecific mechanisms include activation of matrix metalloproteinases and mast cells.\(^8\) A potential association with the \(\text{HLA-DQB1}^*0201\) allele has been described in patients with VVG, suggesting a genetic predisposition; however, a strong association with autoimmune disorders in this variant of LP may in part explain the increased frequency of this allele.\(^5\) Five of 7 patients herein with VVG LP tested positive for the \(\text{HLA-DQB1}^*0201\) allele, whereas the 2 patients without VVG LP were negative for this allele. Given the strong association between erosive mucocutaneous LP, particularly of the VVG syndrome subtype, and multisite scarring sequelae, it is not unexpected that ocular inflammation may lead to subconjunctival fibrosis and lacrimal duct stenosis.

Lichen planus may manifest as ocular involvement, most commonly with lesions affecting the eyelid, which is the location of the lacrimal duct.\(^9,10\) The lacrimal gland produces tears that enter the lacrimal duct and drain into the nose. This system is composed of epithelium-lined lumina. Symptoms of lacrimal canalicular obstruction include epiphora secondary to the overproduction of tears or their inadequate drainage. Stagnant tears within the system can lead to infection, and spillage of tears can lead to eczematous changes on the lower eyelid.

Rarely, LP can affect the conjunctiva, resulting in conjunctival inflammation, cicatrisation, and subepithelial scarring.\(^11,12\) One of our patients had LP that caused recurrent conjunctival injection and photophobia. Lichen planus has also been associated with keratitis and keratoconjunctivitis sicca.\(^13\)

Lacrimal canalicular obstruction may be caused by trauma, eye surgery, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, cicatricial pemphigoid, or use of systemic fluorouracil or certain topical medications.\(^14\) Unilateral obstruction may be seen following herpes simplex virus infection, usually in younger patients following primary periorcular herpes simplex virus infection.\(^15\) Our patients had no history of eye trauma, eye surgery, herpes simplex virus infection, or use of systemic fluorouracil.

Lacrimal duct obstruction is treated by dacryocystorhinostomy with retrograde canaliculostomy. However, the severity of canalicular obstruction associated with LP often results in a poor outcome with this procedure, and primary or secondary placement of Jones tubes (lacrimal drainage bypass devices) is often needed.\(^1\) Four patients underwent lacrimal reconstructive surgery by an ophthalmologist: 1 patient had improvement in her symptoms, while the other 3 patients did not. Medical intervention has seldom been described. One patient with VVG syndrome and lacrimal canalicular stenosis was treated with systemic cyclosporin A (150 mg twice daily), which resulted in total resolution of

---

Figure 1. Right lower eyelid showing white scarring (arrow) around the punctum of the lacrimal duct. A stellate stricture is contiguous to lacrimal duct scarring in the inferior fornix.

Figure 2. Right lower eyelid showing a normal lacrimal duct opening (arrow). No circumferential white scarring (as seen in Figure 1) is observed around the duct opening.
her epiphora after 6 weeks of therapy. Four of 9 patients herein had been prescribed an immunosuppressant for their oral or vulval disease, none of whom reported improvement in their eye symptoms with immunosuppressant treatments.

In conclusion, lacrimal drainage obstruction secondary to LP has been previously reported in 8 patients by Durrani et al in 2008. Histologic findings in tissue from 2 blocked lacrimal ducts herein showed chronic predominantly lymphocytic subepithelial infiltrate, with a few macrophages and occasional mast cells. There was also scattered lymphocytic infiltration of the basal epithelium and thickening and fragmentation of the basement membrane; immunohistochemistry showed no immune complex deposition, and these changes were consistent with LP. Although the patients herein had no histologic diagnosis demonstrating LP in the lacrimal duct, we can assume that the lacrimal canalicular mucosa was affected by LP, causing punctal and canalicular stenosis and subsequent functional lacrimal duct obstruction. We believe that this complication has been underreported among patients with LP and that an ophthalmological history and examination of the punctal of the lacrimal duct should be sought in patients with the erosive subtype of LP.

Accepted for Publication: August 21, 2011.
Correspondence: Naomi K. Webber, MBBS, BSc, John’s Institute of Dermatology, Guy’s and St Thomas’ National Health Service Foundation Trust, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH, England (naomi.webber@doctors.org.uk).

Author Contributions: All authors had full access to all the data in the study and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis. Study concept and design: Webber and Neill. Acquisition of data: Webber, Setterfield, Lewis, and Neill. Analysis and interpretation of data: Webber, Setterfield, and Lewis. Drafting of the manuscript: Webber, Setterfield, Lewis, and Neill. Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Webber, Setterfield, Lewis, and Neill. Study supervision: Neill.

Financial Disclosure: None reported.

REFERENCES


---

**The Best of the Best**

**Top Accessed Article: Motivation for Contemporary Tattoo Removal**


This excellent article by Armstrong and colleagues seeks to determine the reasons for tattoo removal in a detailed questionnaire of 196 patients who presented for laser removal. The authors have produced valuable insight into the patients’ motivations. The results were compared with those in a similar survey that was conducted in 1996.

In contrast to the findings in the earlier survey, women were more likely to seek tattoo removal than men, a common reason being the need to dissociate from the past in some way. Women also experienced more negative comments regarding their tattoos, even in today’s “contemporary” society. The comments originated from fathers, physicians, and the public. As physicians, we should be aware of the impact that our comments and biases have on patients regarding tattoos.

From August 2009 through August 2010, this article was viewed 2681 times on the Archives of Dermatology Web site.

**David M. Ozog, MD**

Contact Dr Ozog at the Department of Dermatology, Henry Ford Hospital, 3031 W Grand Blvd, Ste 800, Detroit, MI 48202 (dozog1@hfhs.org).