

A CASE REPORT OF MERKEL CELL CARCINOMA IN THE SETTING OF HIV

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Background/Purpose:

Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is an aggressive neuroendocrine neoplasm that is more commonly found in immunosuppressed individuals, including people living with HIV (PLHIV). A proposed mechanism for the increased incidence is the higher prevalence of Merkel cell polyomavirus (MCPvY) DNA in HIV-positive men who have sex with men. This case report explores an instance of MCC in a HIV-positive patient with a long history of squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) attending a public HIV clinic. Their HIV physician identified unexpectedly rapid growth in a forearm lesion previously thought to be an SCC awaiting Plastic Surgery review. Review was expedited and the patient underwent biopsy, wide local excision with full thickness skin graft, axillary lymph node dissection and adjuvant radiation therapy.

Approach:

Patient review and consent to case presentation, review of clinical photography and clinical records. Literature review was undertaken to explore the pathophysiology of and link between Merkel cell carcinoma and HIV infection.

Outcomes/Impact:

Immunosuppression affects the incidence and manifestation of skin cancers, which are common in PLHIV. Patients with a history of skin cancer may not advocate for early review with unexpected changes. Enquiry about skin lesions remains an important aspect of HIV care.

Innovation and Significance:

MCC is a rare, aggressive form of skin cancer with a high risk of recurrence and metastasis and a clear association with HIV infection. MCC should be included in the differential diagnosis of skin lesions in PLHIV requiring prompt tissue diagnosis for appropriate treatment planning.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The researchers have no conflicts of interest to disclose.