Reviewer's report

Title: Immunohistochemical investigations in an uncommon variant of scleromyxoedema: Case report

Version: 1 Date: 18 May 2004

Reviewer: Patrick Terheyden

Reviewer's report:

General
In this report by F. Breuckmann and colleagues a typical case of scleromyxoedema is presented. Their excellent description of the disease is extended by some immunohistological stainings, a sonographical documentation and the presentation of two experimental therapies. However, their report does not convey in what the title holds promise and needs some major revisions.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Clinical part: This is a typical case of scleromyxoedema (distribution, firm papules and stiffness of skin). Papular mucinoses are a spectrum of diseases. The authors must eliminate all phrases like “uncommon variant”, “lichen myxoedematosus”, etc. The diagnosis is confirmed by histology and by their finding of paraproteinaemia.

2. Results of treatment: The authors should be aware of the fact that scleromyxoedema has an unpredictable course. This hampered all analyses and studies published so far. Even spontaneous regression is possible. The continuous deterioration before MTX was initiated cannot be proved (?) and stabilisation of disease would be a success. Therefore, “therapy-resistant” is not the adequate term and is confusing. Although impressing, unless serial documentations of dermal thickness were obtained, ultrasound imaging is not necessary to be illustrated by a separate figure. Could the subjective impression of amelioration be confirmed by ultrasound (reduced thickness, altered dermal echogenic pattern)?

3. Immunohistology: The data provided are most interesting. However, the kind of presentation is not appropriate. In an immunohistological investigation (title) the reader expects detailed documentation of the results. Representative stainings should be illustrated together with a detailed methodological description; at least the accumulation of MIB1+ and tryptase+ cells in mucinous deposits must be given. The data should be discussed, eg. mast cells are suspected to play an important role in many mucinoses together with activated fibroblasts. Extremely interesting would be a longitudinal analysis of immunohistological findings before, during and after treatment. Did their intervention influence the parameters investigated?

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

none