CASE REPORT

Case Report: A case of hypertrophic lupus erythematosus with negative CD123 staining and absence of transepidermal elimination of elastin [version 2; peer review: 3 approved]

Previously titled: A case of hypertrophic lupus erythematosus with negative CD123 staining and transepidermal elimination of elastin

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Abstract

We report the case of a 49-year-old male with clinical and histological findings consistent with hypertrophic lupus erythematosus (HLE). HLE must be clinically and histologically differentiated from keratoacanthoma, hypertrophic lichen planus, squamous cell carcinoma and plaque type psoriasis. CD123 positivity and transepidermal elimination of elastin have recently been reported as tools to distinguish HLE. Interestingly, in this case, biopsies of two separate lesions failed to reveal these two features. The etiology of this discrepancy is unknown and further studies are needed to clarify the utility of CD123 positivity and transepidermal elimination of elastin in the diagnosis of hypertrophic lupus erythematosus.

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Referee Status: ✓ ✓ ✓

Invited Referees

1 Victoria P. Werth, University of Pennsylvania, USA
2 Theresa T. Lu, Hospital for Special Surgery, USA
3 Jordan Reynolds, Cleveland Clinic, USA

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.
Introduction

Hypertrophic lupus erythematosus (HLE) is a rare subset of discoid lupus erythematosus, characterized by erythematous, indurated, verrucous papules and nodules located on sun-exposed areas. HLE must be clinically and histologically differentiated from keratoacanthoma, hypertrophic lichen planus, squamous cell carcinoma and plaque type psoriasis. CD123 positivity and transepidermal elimination of elastin have recently been reported to distinguish HLE.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\).

Report of case

A 49-year-old, unemployed, white male presented with a three-year history of an expanding “rash”. He reported no constitutional symptoms. He had previously been treated with oral prednisone and an unknown topical steroid without improvement and was off all medications at our initial visit. The patient had a past medical history of hepatitis C. He denied a family history of skin or autoimmune diseases. Laboratory work-up was significant for positive anti-nuclear antibodies and anti-Ro antibodies. Physical exam revealed multiple hyperkeratotic, verrucous papules and nodules with white, scaly, cribriform centers overlying patches of depigmentation, erythema and atrophy on his bilateral arms (Figure 1) and anterior legs. His face and scalp had several atrophic, depigmented patches. Two punch biopsies were obtained from separate lesions. Histological sections demonstrated an interface inflammatory pattern with deep peri-vascular and peri-appendageal lymphocytic infiltrate and rare plasma cells (Figure 2). A diagnosis of HLE was made. The patient was prescribed clobetasol ointment 0.05% twice daily. At the three month follow-up, there was improvement of the hypertrophic lesions. The patient was subsequently lost to follow-up.

Discussion

HLE was first described by Bechet in 1940.\(^3\) Clinical diagnosis can be challenging as HLE can mimic psoriasis or even squamous cell carcinoma. Uitto et al. described two histological patterns of HLE.\(^4\) One resembled hypertrophic lichen planus, while the other was similar to keratoacanthoma. Daldon et al. found that transepidermal elimination of elastin was present in 14 cases of HLE\(^1\). Ko et al. reported that a band of CD123 positive cells at the dermal-epidermal junction was characteristic of five cases of HLE\(^2\).

In this patient, we examined these two recently described histologic features of HLE. Interestingly, both CD123 positivity and transepidermal elimination of elastin were not present in this case (Figure 3). However, the histological and clinical findings were most consistent with HLE. The etiology of this discrepancy is unknown and further studies are needed to clarify the utility of CD123 positivity and transepidermal elimination of elastin in the diagnosis of hypertrophic lupus erythematosus.

There is no definitive treatment for HLE. Options include topical or intralesional steroids, hydroxychloroquine, topical calcineurin inhibitors, topical or oral retinoids, thalidomide and surgical excision. Winchester et al. reported on the efficacy ustekinumab, an inhibitor of IL-12 and IL-23.\(^7\)

This case highlights the discrepancies of CD 123 positivity and absence of transepidermal elimination of elastin in HLE.
Consent
Written informed consent for publication of clinical details and clinical images was obtained from the patient.

Author contributions
Hughes – data collection, manuscript preparation
Gardner – data collection, manuscript preparation
Gao – manuscript preparation, oversight/supervision

Competing interests
No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information
The author(s) declared that no grants were involved in supporting this work.

References
Open Peer Review

Current Referee Status:  ✔  ✔  ✔

Version 2

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✔ Theresa T. Lu
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The authors have now addressed all the concerns.

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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✔ Victoria P. Werth
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The authors successfully addressed the reviewer comments in this case report.

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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✔ Jordan Reynolds
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This article is well written but needs a few additions to improve it:
1. Please elaborate on what CD 123 is, and how it is used for diagnosing HLE. It is not common knowledge and should be expanded upon.
2. It might also be worth commenting on this paper by Miyashita A et al. (2013, Acta derm venereal) in which the authors showed patients with CD123 positive cells responded better to treatment than patients with low CD123. Do you think any of this could be supported or refuted by your cases?

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

*I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.*
actually koebnerize in a surgical scar, one would not include surgical excision as an option.

The report cited in favor of TNF-alpha inhibitor is on ustekinumab, which is not a TNF inhibitor. This needs revision.

Information about the antibody used for CD123 staining, as well as whether frozen or fixed tissue was used, is important. Anti-CD123 staining is not as good on fixed tissue. Were there any positive controls stained simultaneously?

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

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