Symmetrical drug-related intertriginous and flexural exanthema secondary to epidermal growth factor receptor inhibitor gefitinib

Beatrice Copps, BSc, a Jean-Philip Lacroix, MD, b and Denis Sasseville, MD b

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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INTRODUCTION

Gefitinib, an epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) inhibitor, has been associated with several cutaneous side effects. We report a patient presenting with symmetrical drug-related intertriginous and flexural exanthema (SDRIFE) associated with gefitinib treatment for stage IV non–small cell lung cancer.

CASE

A 72 year-old woman known for having lung adenocarcinoma metastatic to the brain presented to the emergency department for a 2-month history of a severe skin eruption involving the gluteal, inguinal, axillary, and inframammary areas. The lesions were pruritic and became significantly more painful over the week preceding her presentation to the emergency department. No systemic symptoms were reported. The patient was started on gefitinib, a tyrosine kinase inhibitor of EGFR, 4 weeks before the onset of the eruption.

Examination found well-defined V-shaped erythema of the gluteal and inguinal/perigenital areas extending to the medial thighs symmetrically. The inframammary and axillary folds presented a similar erythematous eruption bilaterally. Red satellite lesions, purulent discharge, and honey-colored crusting suggested secondary infection of the eruption (Fig 1).

Medical and dermatologic history

The patient had stage IV non–small cell lung cancer diagnosed 9 months before presentation. Medical history includes a remote history of breast cancer surgically resected in 1987. Her dermatologic history was notable for a remote episode of shingles. In addition, during a previous hospitalization, the patient had a documented allergic reaction to amoxicillin, which caused a generalized erythematous eruption that resolved 2 weeks after the discontinuation of the antibiotic. Medications before the initiation of gefitinib treatment included levothyroxine.

Histopathology and skin cultures

The skin biopsy results showed extensive dermal inflammatory infiltrate, mainly composed of lymphocytes, neutrophils, and eosinophils, with prominent papillary dermal edema and minimal epidermal changes, consistent with a drug eruption (Fig 2). Culture of skin swabs found growth of Klebsiella spp., Enterococcus spp., and Candida albicans.

Laboratory data

Laboratory values at the time of admission were significant only for electrolyte abnormalities (potassium, 2.4 mmol/L; magnesium, 0.65 mmol/L; phosphate, 0.55 mmol/L). Results of a complete blood

From McGill Faculty of Medicine a and the Department of Medicine, Division of Dermatology, b McGill University Health Centre.

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Correspondence to: Beatrice Copps, BSc, McMaster University, Division of Dermatology, Health Sciences Centre, Room 3VS1, 1200 Main St W, Hamilton, ON L8N 3Z5. E-mail: beatrice.copps@mail.mcgill.ca.

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count, hepatic function panel, and a venous blood gas were all within normal limits.

**Treatment and evolution**

At presentation, gefitinib was stopped, and the patient was initially treated with silver sulfadiazine cream, ciclopirox olamine cream, and oral fluconazole with only mild improvement. The patient improved significantly after being treated with oral dexamethasone, 8 mg twice a day for 1 week, which was then tapered over 2 weeks, and topical hydrocortisone 1% cream twice a day (Fig 3).

Given the progression of the cancer and lack of alternative treatment, the oncologist decided to restart gefitinib after 4 weeks of discontinuation with close monitoring. The intertriginous and flexural exanthems flared after 1 week of treatment, which confirmed gefitinib to be the causative agent. Concomitant to the flexural exacerbation, the patient also developed new papulopustular lesions on the cheeks, chest, and lower extremities, an eruption commonly associated with gefitinib. These lesions were accompanied by dry eyes and alopecia, a constellation of symptoms consistent with PRIDE syndrome (papulopustules and/or paronychia, regulatory abnormalities of hair growth, itching, dryness due to EGFR inhibitors). Gefitinib was stopped once again because of worsening of the flexural erythema.

**DISCUSSION**

The term *baboon syndrome* was originally presented in 1984 to describe a cutaneous reaction brought on by systemic exposure to mercury vapors (ie, via inhalation) in patients with a known previous cutaneous sensitization, usually with mercury-containing topical preparations. The authors described a characteristic pattern of diffuse
erythema of the buttocks extending to the upper inner surface of the thighs, associated with erythema of the axillae.

Häusermann et al. coined the acronym SDRIFE to further define the subset of cases of baboon syndrome manifesting the characteristic eruption after systemic absorption of medications, in the absence of a known history of previous cutaneous sensitization. The proposed criteria for SDRIFE feature (1) exposure to a systemically administered drug at first or repeated dose (excluding contact allergens), (2) sharply demarcated erythema of the gluteal/perianal area and/or V-shaped erythema of the inguinal/perigenital area, (3) involvement of at least one other intertriginous/flexural localization, (4) symmetry of affected areas, and (5) absence of systemic involvement.5

It is worth noting that although the criteria by Häusermann et al.5 criteria require the absence of a reported history of cutaneous sensitization, the diagnosis does not require or predict a negative patch test per se. In fact, patch tests serve an equivocal purpose in the diagnosis of SDRIFE, as less than half of cases will test positive.6,7 Prick testing result is negative in most cases of SDRIFE.6

Drug provocation tests are the gold standard for determining the offending agent.6,7

In addition to well-demarcated erythema in the flexures, SDRIFE may present with small papules, pustules, and vesicles overlying the erythema.5,8 The eruption spares the face, palms, soles, and mucosa.5 Multiple drugs have been associated with SDRIFE, namely, amoxicillin,9 penicillin,9,10 valacyclovir,11 risperidone,12 and infliximab.13

Our patient meets the five criteria for SDRIFE, and recurrence of the eruption after re-exposure to gefitinib confirms that it is the causative agent. In this case, a patch test was not performed, as it would have been redundant in the context of a repeated reaction following re-exposure.

The approval of gefitinib as a first-line agent for metastatic non–small cell lung cancer by the US Food and Drug Administration14 will undoubtedly lead to the growing use of this agent. As such, increased awareness of SDRIFE as a potential cutaneous adverse drug reaction to this type of EGFR inhibitor is essential.

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