Erysipelas of the upper extremity: About 25 cases of breast cancer with loco regional therapy

Saadani CH*, Baybay H, Zinoune S, Douhi Z and Mernissi FZ
Department of Dermatology, Hassan II hospital, Fes, Morocco

Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of erysipelas of the upper extremity in women treated for breast cancer.

Methods: A study of 7-years retro-prospective study identifying 25 cases of erysipelas of the upper extremity following treatment for breast cancer; was carried out between March 2010 and December 2017 at the Hassan II hospital Fes, Morocco, we describe the clinical, therapeutic, and evolutionary aspects.

Results: The mean age was of 48.17 years. All patients had a breast surgery and lymphadenectomy. The erysipelas appeared with an average of 5.23 years after cancer treatment and was recurrent in seven cases. Lymphedema occurred in eighteen patients. The clinical aspect was an inflammatory plaque. The portal of entry was found in 73.91% of patients. The upper limb was affected in all cases. Involvement of the axillary folds or the chest was observed in 30.43%. Treatment with amoxicillin associated with clavulanic acid was undertaken for all patients.

Conclusion: Lymphadenectomy and radiotherapy in breast cancer may lead to lymphedema, which can be evident or sometimes discrete. Those patients who developed erysipelas in our series usually fared well with treatment, but many had recurrences attributed to persistent lymphedema.

Introduction

Erysipelas is a distinct type of superficial cutaneous cellulitis with marked dermal lymphatic vessel involvement caused by group A beta hemolytic streptococcus, rarely caused by S. aureus [1]. Lymphedema, venous stasis, web intertrigo, and obesity are risk factors in the adult patient [2]. Erysipelas of the upper extremity in women treated for breast cancer is relatively known but rarely reported. Malignancy and local impairment of venous and lymphatic circulation are reported to be predisposing factors. We attempted to characterize the clinical and evolutionary characteristics of erysipelas after treatment of breast cancer.

Materials and methods

Our study was a retro-prospective analysis of 255 patients with erysipelas observed during the period from march 2010 until December 2017 at the department of dermatology at Hassan II Hospital Fes, Morocco, we identify 25 cases of erysipelas of the upper limb following treatment for breast cancer.

The clinical data were collected from the files of the hospitalized patients.

For each patient we recorded the age, past medical history, clinical findings, laboratory finds, treatment, and outcome.

Results

The age of our patients ranged between 31 and 75 years with a mean age of 48.17 years. All our patients had undergone mastectomy and lymphadenectomy for breast cancer, 12 had chemotherapy, and 20 had radiotherapy. History of obesity was found in 7 patients, diabetes in 6. Lymphedema was noted in thirteen patients.

The erysipelas appeared with an average of 5.23 years after cancer treatment (3 months to 15 years) and was recurrent in 7 cases, the number of episodes varied from 1 to 3.

The portal of entry was found in 73.91%, with (post traumatic wound: 8.69%; interdigital tinea: 13.03%, under breast :13.03%, mastectomy scar :13.03%).

The site of involvement was the homolateral superior limb for all the cases. Involvement of the axillary folds or the chest was observed in 30.43% (Figure 1). The clinical aspect was an inflammatory plaque in all cases. It was complicated by purpura in three case (Figure 2), blisters in 26.03%.

Laboratory abnormalities included increased white blood cell count (with predominance of segmented neutrophils) in fifteen cases; the white count was normal in eight cases, and the CRP was increased in twenty cases. The score of Laboratory Risk Indicator for Necrotizing Fasciitis (LRINEC) was > 6 in 5 cases.

Outcome was favorable. All patients were treated with intravenous amoxicillin associated with clavulanic acid (50mg/kg/day). Once the patients became afebrile and otherwise had a marked improvement, the route of penicillin administration was changed to oral. The duration of treatment varied between 6 and 30 days with an average of 16 days. Prevention with benzyl penicillin was initiated in 44.82% of patients.

*Correspondence to: Saadani CH, Department of Dermatology, Hassan II hospital, Fes, Morocco, E-mail: ch.saadani@gmail.com

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The occurrence of erysipelas following treatment of breast cancer correlates with the associated lymphedema. The treatment is an antibiotic during the acute phase of the disease and eventually an antibiotic prophylaxis to avoid recurrences. Attention should be given to measures that prevent lymphedema and eradicate potential portals of entry.

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