



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Clinical Conundrums In The Elderly – A Dermatologist's Dilemma

Dr V Mohana Priya , Dr Aneesh S

Junior resident , Professor and Head Of Department

Department of Dermatology , MVJ Medical college and Research Hospital

ABSTRACT

Background:

Dermatological conditions in the elderly often present with atypical clinical features, making diagnosis and management challenging. Chronic sun exposure, underlying systemic diseases, and reduced immune surveillance contribute to a broad spectrum of dermatological manifestations, some mimicking malignancy. This case series presents three unique cases that highlight the diagnostic dilemmas faced by dermatologists in elderly patients.

Case 1: An 88-year-old farmer presented with itchy, eczematous plaques and a leonine facies appearance, initially suspected as lepromatous leprosy or deep fungal infection. Histopathology confirmed cutaneous pseudo lymphoma secondary to chronic actinic dermatitis. Phototherapy exacerbated lesions, reinforcing the need for photoprotection, which led to significant improvement.

Case 2: A 78-year-old male developed a progressively enlarging, painful swelling over the right elbow. Given its atypical location, differentials included angioliipoma and leiomyoma. Histopathology confirmed a glomus tumour, underscoring the importance of considering vascular neoplasms in unusual sites.

Case 3: An 83-year-old male presented with multiple, gradually enlarging scalp lesions following trauma. Biopsy revealed poorly differentiated carcinoma. Despite recommendations for surgical excision and radiotherapy, the patient declined treatment due to financial constraints, highlighting barriers to optimal care.

Conclusion:

This case series emphasizes the need for clinical vigilance in elderly dermatology patients, as benign-appearing lesions may harbour malignancy, and rare conditions can mimic more common diseases. Timely histopathological evaluation and appropriate intervention are essential for improving patient outcomes. Early recognition and individualized management strategies play a crucial role in addressing the unique dermatological challenges in geriatric patients.

Introduction

The aging population presents a unique set of dermatological challenges. Chronic sun exposure, underlying systemic conditions, and atypical presentations complicate diagnosis and management. This case series highlights three perplexing cases in elderly patients—chronic actinic dermatitis with cutaneous pseudo lymphoma, an atypically located glomus tumour, and a poorly differentiated carcinoma of the scalp. These cases underscore the importance of clinical vigilance, histopathological confirmation, and timely intervention in managing dermatological conditions in the elderly.

Case 1: Chronic Actinic Dermatitis with Cutaneous Pseudo lymphoma

Chronic actinic dermatitis (CAD) is a severe photosensitivity disorder triggered by UVB, UVA, and visible light, primarily affecting elderly men. It can predispose patients to cutaneous pseudo lymphoma, a benign but persistent lymphoid proliferation that can mimic malignancy.

An 88-year-old male farmer presented with multiple itchy, raised eczematous plaques and a leonine facies appearance, characterized by skin-coloured papulo-nodules (1×1 cm) over the forehead, nose, and cheeks, along with coalescing plaques on both hands. Initial differentials included lepromatous leprosy, deep fungal infection, and follicular mucinosis. Neurological examination was normal, slit-skin smear and PAS staining were negative.

A biopsy confirmed cutaneous pseudo lymphoma. Phototherapy with narrow-band UVB (NBUVB) at 350 mJ/cm² was attempted, but lesion exacerbation suggested a reduced minimal erythema dose (MED) for NBUVB. The patient was managed with strict sun avoidance and photoprotection, leading to a marked resolution of lesions within two months. This case highlights the necessity of considering pseudo lymphoma in papulonodular presentations and underscores the role of photoprotection in chronic actinic dermatitis.



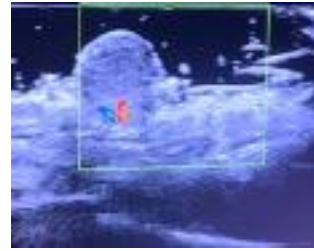
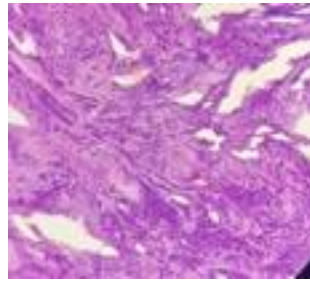
Case 2: Atypical Glomus Tumour of the Elbow

Glomus tumours are benign vascular neoplasms, predominantly found in the subungual region. Their presence in atypical locations, especially in the elderly, can pose diagnostic challenges.

A 78-year-old male presented with a three-year history of a painful, gradually enlarging swelling over his right elbow, disturbing his sleep. There was no history of trauma. Clinical examination revealed a 1×1 cm erythematous, fluctuant swelling, markedly tender on palpation. Differential diagnoses included angiolioma, angiomyolipoma, leiomyoma cutis, and pyogenic granuloma.

Ultrasound revealed a hypoechoic lesion with minimal vascularity. Excision biopsy confirmed a glomus tumour, with histopathology showing characteristic glomus cells—monotonous rounded cells with pale eosinophilic cytoplasm and central nuclei arranged around blood vessels.

This case highlights the need for recognizing glomus tumours in non-traditional sites, especially in elderly patients, to ensure early diagnosis and effective management.



Case 3: Poorly Differentiated Carcinoma of the Scalp

An 83-year-old male presented with gradually increasing, multiple raised scalp lesions over 2–3 months. The lesions were painless, non-itchy, and not friable. The patient had a history of trauma prior to lesion onset but had no keloidal tendencies. He was a known case of type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Clinical examination revealed multiple erythematous papules over the left temporoparietal scalp, some with hyperpigmentation. Oozing and crusting were noted. Differential diagnoses included foreign body granuloma, hypertrophic scar, scar sarcoidosis, lupus vulgaris, and sebaceous carcinoma.

Histopathology from a 3 mm punch biopsy revealed nests of malignant cells with marked pleomorphism, a high nuclear-to-cytoplasmic ratio, and 8–10 mitotic figures per high-power field—suggestive of a poorly differentiated carcinoma. CB-NAAT was negative. The patient was advised surgical excision with Mohs micrographic surgery and radiotherapy following MRI evaluation. However, due to financial constraints, he declined treatment and was lost to follow-up.

This case highlights the need for a high index of suspicion for malignancies in elderly patients with atypical lesions, as early intervention can significantly alter outcomes.



Conclusion

These cases illustrate the diagnostic and therapeutic dilemmas dermatologists face in elderly patients. Chronic actinic dermatitis mimicking cutaneous lymphoma, a glomus tumour in an uncommon location, and a poorly differentiated carcinoma of the scalp—all emphasize the need for thorough clinical evaluation, appropriate histopathological workup, and a multidisciplinary approach. Early diagnosis and intervention remain key in optimizing patient outcomes, particularly in the elderly, where subtle presentations can often mask serious pathology.