

Harriet's Hands

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Meet Harriet

- Harriet is a 36-year-old Caucasian female with numerous papules on the dorsum of her hands of about one year's duration. They have been increasing in number over time
- They are generally asymptomatic, though they are occasionally itchy
- A mild topical steroid was prescribed, which did not seem to improve the lesions
- She is otherwise healthy, takes no medications, and has no family history of skin problems



What is your diagnosis?

- a) Gottron's papules of dermatomyositis b) Common warts d) Knuckle pads
e) Dyshidrotic eczema c) Psoriasis

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See page 2 for the answer to last month's case 



Here is the answer to last month's case

Meet Tom

- A 52-year-old male presents with a disfigured big toenail
- He believes that the disfigurement resulted from an injury that occurred at least one year ago
- It is asymptomatic



What is your diagnosis?

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| a) Tinea fungus | c) Trauma | e) Verruca |
| b) Melanoma | d) Nevus | |

Answer: B

Melanoma of the big toenail (**answer b**) often goes unrecognized by patients and their physicians until it is at an advanced stage. The delay in diagnosis is estimated at two years after onset, and, therefore, the prognosis is poor.

Involvement of a nail bed accounts for 2% of all melanomas in Caucasians and as high as 35% of melanomas in dark skinned ethnic groups. Usually, the thumb and big toenail are the digits involved. It affects both sexes equally. Onset generally occurs in the fifth decade of life. Most patients relate trauma as the initial reason for the changes in their nail.

The most recognized precursor for diagnosis by a physician is the appearance of a brown to black pigmentation of the cuticle (Hutchinson's sign). This is followed by an extension of colour beneath the nail, which produces a pigmented streak that is often confused with bruising. A bruise, however, does not exhibit Hutchinson's sign.

A delayed diagnosis in African-Americans may occur, as up to 90% of them will have longitudinal bands on their nails by age 50. Importance must be placed on the darkened cuticle, the widening of the streak, and

a variegate colour to help validate the presumed diagnosis. Eventually, elevation of the nail bed and destruction of the nail itself will occur, as seen in this patient. At this stage, 20% of such individuals will have involvement of the regional nodes.

Treatment involves the amputation of the digit, and, at times, regional node removal is necessary to properly stage the tumour.

Stanley J. Wine, MD, FRCPC



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