

“Should I worry about these papules?”

Benjamin Barankin, MD

An elderly male patient presented with asymptomatic bluish-purple papules on his ear and on his lower lip (Figures 1 and 2). He didn't like the appearance, and was wondering whether he should be concerned about these lesions.

What is the diagnosis?

This patient has venous lakes, which present as dark blue-to-violaceous non-proliferative vascular papules. Venous lakes are caused by the dilation of venules. They can be easily compressed, and tend to occur on sun-exposed ears and lips (usually lower lip) of elderly patients. Venous lakes are almost always asymptomatic. Commonly, men are far more affected than women. People of all races are equally affected.

What does the examination reveal?

Physical examination usually reveals a soft, compressible, blue-violaceous papule. Venous lakes typically are distributed on the sun-exposed surfaces of the face and neck, especially on the helix and antihelix of the ear, and on the vermilion border of the lower lip. Patients often have other evidence of chronic sun exposure.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis is almost always clinical, and no blood work or imaging is required. If there is any suspicion of this lesion, based on history or appearance, a punch or shave biopsy should be performed. Diascopy (pressure with a glass slide) can be used to differentiate this vascular lesion from a neoplasm, as the venous lake should partially to completely blanch with applied pressure.



Figure 1. Bluish-purple papules on the patient's right ear.



Figure 2. Bluish-purple papules on the patient's lower lip.

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What is their importance?

Venous lakes are clinically important because of their mimicry of more ominous lesions, such as melanoma, and the pigmented basal cell carcinoma.

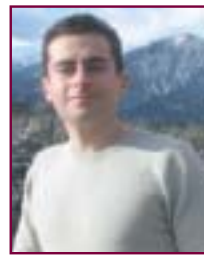
What are the dangers?

Venous lakes do not resolve on their own, and there is no risk of progression to skin cancer.

What's the treatment?

There is no medical treatment. Surgical treatment, however, can be performed for cosmetic reasons or to alleviate recurrent bleeding. Electrodesiccation,

excision, and cryotherapy have all been successful therapeutic modalities. More expensive, new vascular lasers have been similarly effective. **CME**



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Nation's Top Doctors Honoured

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) recently honoured 10 family physicians—one from each province—with the title of “Canada’s Family Physicians of the Year” for 2003/04.

The physicians honoured were:

- Dr. Art Macgregor, British Columbia
- Dr. Harvey Woytiuk, Alberta
- Dr. Vicki Holmes, Saskatchewan
- Dr. Denis Fortier, Manitoba
- Dr. Val Rachlis, Ontario
- Dr. Richard Boulé, Quebec
- Dr. Jean-Pierre Arseneau, New Brunswick
- Dr. Murdock Smith, Nova Scotia
- Dr. Philip Hansen, Prince Edward Island
- Dr. Frank Hicks, Newfoundland

“Whether it’s providing community leadership in the face of SARS, or developing programs to help teen mothers get back to school, aiding the homeless, or fundraising on behalf of important public health issues, the breadth of their individual pursuits demonstrates how, on a daily basis, family doctors are contributing to the health and well-being of their patients and communities,” said Dr. Calvin Gutkin, executive director and CEO of the CFPC.



From left to right (front): Dr. Jean-Pierre Arseneau; Dr. Vicki Holmes; Dr. Arthur Macgregor; (second row): Dr. Harvey Woytiuk; Dr. Richard Boulé; Dr. Murdock Smith; Dr. Denis Fortier (back row): Dr. Philip Hansen; Dr. Frank Hicks Missing; Dr. Val Rachlis.

Each recipient received a Reg L. Perkin award, named in honour of the CFPC executive director from 1985 to 1996. The awards are supported through a grant from Janssen-Ortho Inc. to the CFPC’s Research and Education Foundation. Recipients are selected through a nomination process including their peers, other health-care colleagues, community leaders, and patients.

For more information, contact Leslie Stafford, communications officer, at (905) 629-0900, ext. 303.