

CUTANEOUS METASTASES IN CHILDREN. A HISTOPATHOLOGICAL CASE REPORT AND REVIEW

Zamfir-Radu Ionescu^{1,2}

Abstract

Cutaneous metastases are a rare finding in children, being diagnosed usually after primary tumor discovery, however it may be the first sign of a malignancy. Therefore, the origin tumor could be diagnosed through the pathological findings, but in most cases this is impossible due to scant amount of tissue involved in the metastasis. This article tries to approach, through available scientific literature and procedures, a unidentified carcinomatous metastasis discovered in a 14 years old boy, proving to be a undifferentiated epithelial tumor. The importance of cytokeratins CK7 and CK20 is discussed, together with histological distinctive characteristics of other tumors that may metastasize and differential diagnosis with primary adnexal carcinomas that may mimic skin metastases.

Key words: cutaneous metastases, adnexal tumors, immunohistochemistry, children

Introduction

Metastasis is defined as a neoplastic lesion arising from another neoplasm that has no further continuity with it. Skin metastasis is defined as a spread of malignant cells from a primary malignant tumor to different regions of the skin. Cutaneous metastases (CM) have an increasing incidence in children nowadays, when histological detection is more accurate to lower ages, especially when differential diagnosis for benign conditions are taken in account. Skin secondary tumors appear as a consequence of primary tumor development, mostly soft tissue, being dependent on vascular or lymphatic spreading [1]. Many cases have been reported regarding all types of malignancies metastatic to skin, but few systematic attempts have been made to consider a pattern of apparition. No matter what the size and condition of the specimen might be, most carcinomatous metastases might be classified as adenocarcinoma, squamous cell or undifferentiated. Skin secondary malignancies with visceral origin are very important for dermatologists, pathologists and surgeons because of their multiform clinical presentation, while diagnosis delay might become dangerous for the child outcome [2]. Furthermore, CM might be the very first sign of a developing cancer or a recurrent tumor condition. The suspicion is raised by the pediatric doctor, while the surgeon and the pathologist might elaborate a final diagnosis. Therefore, rapid intervention becomes mandatory, while the survivability of a patient with a cutaneous metastasis is low being around 7.5 months [3]. The most frequent site of the CM are the abdomen skin

(26%), followed by head and neck (25%), arms, legs, trunk, axillae, shoulder and anus. In females, 75% of cases are located on the anterior aspect of the abdomen and chest, while in men, the election region remains the anterior aspects of head and neck region. The back skin is a rare site for metastasis. The pathologists describe four main characteristics in CM: nodular, infiltrative, diffuse and intravascular [4].

Case report

A 14 years old boy presented to the Dermatologist office in our hospital for 3 melanocytic-like lesions: (a) first on posterior aspect of the right thorax, (b) the second at the right costal rebord and (c) the last located on the left internal maleolar region (fig. 1). The macroscopic appearance of the first lesion was that of an elevated, ovoid, brownish circumscribed lesion – 0,4/0,3/0,2 cm – while the second lesion (b) had larger dimensions – i.e, 0,7 / 0,7 / 0,3 cm – being almost spherical, bulging at the site. The third one (c) was also ovoid, but more irregular colored – brown and white alternant areas – with an gritty aspect, and intermediate dimensions, approximately 1,0 / 0,6 / 0,4 cm. The routine clinical and biological examination of the child revealed no abnormalities, having no paraclinical deviations (Fig 1). The young patient was referred to the Surgical Department where resections have been made for the above mentioned lesions, within safety margins, and the obtained rhomboidal-shaped specimens were referred to the Pathology Department. The tissue samples were fixed in buffered formalin 10%, and processed in our laboratory in successive alcohol grades (70°, 80°, 96°), paraffin embedded, sectioned and stained through standard procedure for haematoxylin and eosin. At microscopic examination, the second lesion showed a keratoachantoma-like appearance, junctional melanocytic activity, with type B and C melanocytes and rare melanosomes, arranged in compact groups, located between the rete ridges, with no mitotic activity or atypia. However, the third lesion proved more cytological activity, with slight melanocytic atypia and normal mitoses (0-3 / 10 HPF), bridging of adjacent, irregular, rete ridges, lentiginous proliferation of hyperchromatic, epithelioid and spindled melanocytes at dermoepidermal junction. Therefore, the final diagnosis for the second (b) and third (c) resected masses remains that of a (b) compound melanocytic naevus, respectively, (c) Clark or dysplastic naevus (fig 2).

¹Department of Pathology, Pediatric Emergency Hospital, Pitești, Romania

²The University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Carol Davila”, Bucharest, Romania

E-mail: dr.raduionescu@yahoo.com

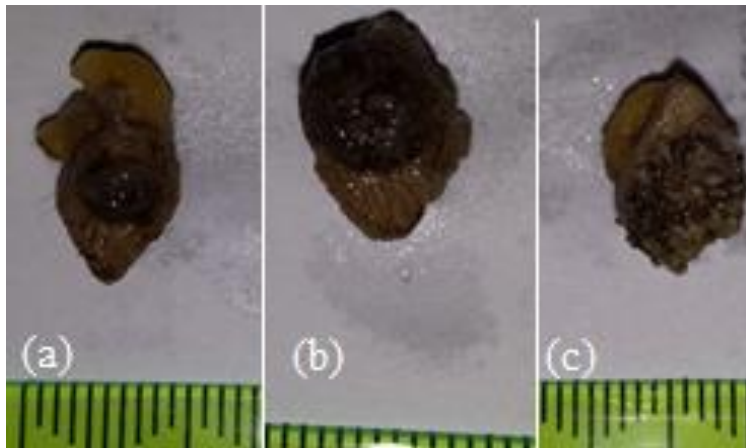


Fig 1. Macroscopical aspect of resected specimens for supposed naevi (buffered formalin 10%): (a) the lesion in matter - posterior aspect of the right thorax; (b) right costal rebord and (c) left internal maleolar region.

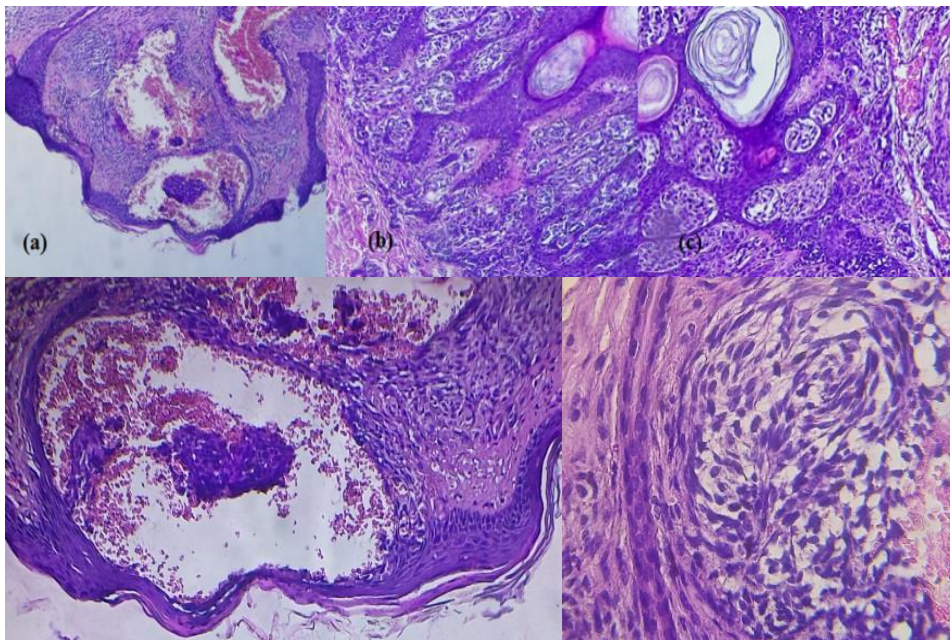


Fig 2. Histological aspects of resected specimens: (a) cutaneous metastase of unknown epithelial origin, ectatic vessels and spindle, clear, cell dermal perivascular, infiltrative pattern (4x10, HE); (b) histological aspect of a compound naevus with dermoepidermal junctional melanocytic activity, arranged in compact groups (10x10, HE); (c) dysplastic melanocytic groups situated at the tip of connected rete ridges and architectural pleomorphism (10x10, HE); down - details from lesion (a): left – intravascular cell group, with clear cell-like dystrophy, floating inside the lumen, surrounded by infiltrative pattern; right – infiltration of whorled, plexiform, spindle cell with clear cytoplasm, that delineates angiomatoid spaces (10x40, HE).

The first lesion (a) presented as a nodule, with ectatic vascular, angiomatoid, spaces developed within an capillary haemangioma, confined to the dermis, with epidermal hyperkeratosis and rete ridges effacement. These vessels showed no endothelial lining, being delineated by a plexiform, clear cell population, with a central, pyknotic and hypercomatic nuclei, with no atypia or mitoses, having a

infiltrative, spindle shaped pattern and an epidermolitic activity. Within the vascular lumina, free floating glomeruloid, whorled, cellular groups were detected, having slight atypia and some intracytoplasmic vacuoles, probably containing lipids, that were consistent with an unspecifiable epithelial origin (Fig). The final diagnosis was that of a undifferentiated invasive carcinoma metastasis as the

infiltrative behaviour corresponds with this kind of tumor, i.e. spindle, plump rounded cells, focally with clear cell features suggesting a high grade pleomorphical neoplasm. Renal cell carcinoma, angiosarcoma and Kaposi sarcoma were ruled out, as no morphological and paraclinical criteria sustained these entities for the case in matter. Also atypical angiomatoid hyperplasia was in discussion, however vascular spaces are not so ectatic and the presence of intraluminal metastasis ruled out benign conditions. The child was referred to our local Oncological department for further investigation and treatment. Immunohistochemical analysis for the metastatic cells is out of discussion, as the necessary tissue volume is far insufficient for analysis.

Discussions

Clinically, most skin metastases appear as a rapidly-growing solitary or multiple mass, firm, flesh-coloured, round or oval, elevated lesion located in dermis or subcutaneous, that may have a stationary evolution. Sometimes, palpation might prove a local painful indurated tumor [5]. The variability of presentations might include nodules, papules, plaques and ulcers. Other frequent clinical expressions are alopecia, morphea-like lesions, dermatofibroma-like or pyogenic granuloma-like lesions, herpetic-like eruptions or even cellulitis [6]. Histologically, CM are more chaotic than primary tumors, as CM involve collagen dissection and a rich vasculature with no epidermotropic pattern. In children, renal cancer might be very frequent. Differential diagnosis with local evolving Kaposi sarcoma, pyogenic granuloma or other vascular proliferations, should be made with a CM of a renal cell carcinoma. In these situations, CM might simulate an abscess on the head, neck or face. Histologically, proximal renal tubular cells might become visible showing a trabecular, papillary or tubulopapillary pattern, with a prominent vascular pattern, extravasation of red cells and hemosiderin, while the cells contain abundant glycogen and lipids, sometimes showing plexiform appearance [7]. Also, gastrointestinal tumors might express a nodule located in middle or lower dermis, forming glands, clusters or strands of neoplastic cells together with an intense desmoplastic reaction. Colorectal carcinomas, however rare in children, should not be disregarded as a possible condition. The CM of this particular cancer appear on skin as a „Sister Mary Joseph’s nodule”, with forming glands and intense mucin production. In the above described situations, Alcian-blue, periodic acid-Schiff, CDX2, CK7 and CK20, together with carcinoembryonic antigen and EMA should clarify the diagnosis (5). Gynaecological malignancies rarely metastasize to skin, especially in children. However, cases have been cited of CM from ovarian tumors. Metastasis occur mostly in scars at the sites of paracentesis, and, present psammoma bodies, followed by a mucinous and endometrioid characteristic pattern. Breast carcinoma, although improbable in small children, becomes a serious condition in adolescents and young adults. In these situations, most CM have an undifferentiated pattern, while a well-formed duct pattern is less likely to be encountered. For instance, the pathologist may have difficulties in

detecting breast lobular carcinoma CM. Although, CK7 and CK20 might help differentiating from a possible emergent digestive source, GCDFP-15 is a marker of apocrine differentiation in breast epithelium and might be used to confirm the mammary origin. In some cases, the breast malignant CM are further difficult to differentiate from a malignant melanoma, especially in epidermotropic metastases, as in-tumor melanocyte proliferation may occur. In heavy smoking adolescents, lung carcinoma may develop CM, located usually on the chest wall and posterior trunk, giving a clue for their origin. It is well known that lung small cell carcinoma is characteristically involving back skin. Differentials are made with primary Merkel cell carcinoma (CK20 positive and thyroid transcription factor 1 – TTF1 negative), squamous cell carcinoma and metastatic digestive carcinomas, while lung small cell cancer is CK20 negative and TTF1 positive [8]. Sarcomas might deliver CM as an inaugural disease manifestation, like in a femoral osteosarcoma case, presented as two scalp nodular tumor [9]. Rare soft tissue tumors, like alveolar soft part sarcoma CM to scalp areas in a 21 years old man, were cited, but molecular analysis was required to identify the primary tumor, with RNA extraction and reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction in order to detect a specific genetic locus, called transcription factor 3, as this kind of neoplasm may have a close resemblance with renal cell cancer on standard stains [10]. Therefore, routine differentials for sarcomas or soft tissue neoplasms are almost impossible, requiring molecular biology techniques. In order to sustain a diagnosis, the pathologist may need to differentiate between primary cutaneous tumors and secondary metastases. Thus, primary adnexal carcinoma may mimic the pleomorphic multitude of cutaneous metastases, however these are very rare in children. Ductal eccrine carcinoma may mimic a ductal breast neoplasm metastatic to skin, while mucinous variant may, very well, resemble a gastrointestinal CM. However, some authors sustain that these lesions are easily recognizable on routine stained sections. Although rare, high grade spindle cell sweat gland carcinoma, having a whorled, organoid, concentric pattern might be similar to nasopharyngeal CM [11].

Conclusions

Although any form of malignant tumor may metastasize to skin, in current practice there is a small number of neoplasms that are likely to do so. Immunohistochemical profiling is mandatory, especially regarding CK 7 and CK20, however, in undifferentiated carcinomas CM the antigen panel is almost impossible to apply as, in most cases, some like ours, there is no sufficient tumoral tissue for all molecular analysis possibilities. Therefore, interdepartmental approach – surgeon, pathologist, oncologist and radiologist – for this kind of situations must be accomplished for most accurate diagnosis.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interests. We undersign, certificate that the procedures and the reports we have done respect the ethical standards in the Helsinki

Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000, as well as the national law.

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Correspondence to:

Dr. Ionescu Zamfir-Radu, M.D, PhD
 Department of Pathology and Morgue
 Pediatric Emergency Hospital
 Bd. Dacia, Nr.1, Pitești, Argeș County, Romania
 Tel: +0346086086
 E-mail: dr.raduionescu@yahoo.com