Spontaneous cyclical pigmentary changes in a conjunctival naevus

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SUMMARY A conjunctival naevus which showed profound changes in growth and pigmentation over a period of 15 years is presented.

Spontaneous changes in the shape and size of a conjunctival naevus due to regression is very rare. Reese has described the complete regression of a conjunctival naevus, but no other cases resembling this have been recorded. The following case is not one of regression, but nevertheless the pigmentary changes over the years have been sufficiently profound to be thought worth reporting.

Case report

The patient is a white male and was 13 years old when first seen in 1965. The naevus (Fig. 1) was about 2 mm from the limbus at 1 o'clock in the right eye. It was jet black with a brown halo-like area round it, widest below. About 1 mm temporal to the main mass there was a pinpoint satellite lesion. No change was noticed in May or August 1965, but by May 1966 profound changes had taken place (Fig. 2). The lesion was now T shaped and the satellite lesion had disappeared.

By June 1967 the naevus was changing its shape, and in September 1968 (Fig. 3) it looked like a brown powder with only one small black area remaining. The lower part of this area would appear to be outside the original black mass of January 1965 (Fig. 1).

This appearance was maintained until January 1971, when the patient’s mother noticed a change. By
June 1971 the naevus was again quite visible (Fig. 4). This was a new area of growth temporal to the previous remaining area, which had largely disappeared.

Over the next 5 years the naevus again regressed, and in January 1976 it consisted of a few black spots arranged in a linear fashion from 8 o'clock to 2 o'clock with a surrounding brown area (Fig. 5). Subsequently, the black spots disappeared, and by December 1980 all that remained was a brown lesion of powdery appearance (Fig. 6). A small part of it was taken for biopsy.

**BIOPSY**

The conjunctival biopsy was a piece of membranous tissue 2 mm in diameter and light brown in colour. Paraffin sections revealed that the subepithelial tissues were packed with clumps of naeval cells and also...
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contained the epithelial cysts which are a feature of conjunctival naevi (Fig. 7). There were no definite junctional nests, the naeval cells all being subepithelial. In the deeper parts of the tumour the naeval cells were small, deeply staining, tightly packed, and difficult to distinguish from lymphocytes. However, it was considered that the cells were naeval cells with only a sparse infiltration of lymphocytes. Stains from melanin showed only scanty pigment present. There were no melanophages and no pigment in the epithelium. Hence the biopsy revealed a poorly pigmented subepithelial naevus with only a slight lymphocyte infiltrate.

My thanks to Dr J. Little for the histology report.

Reference


Fig. 7  *Histological appearance of biopsy specimen.*  
(Haematoxylin and eosin, ×102).