COVID-19 Presenting as Enanthem and Itchy Exanthem

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Sir,

Dermatologists can play a very important role in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as early recognition of skin lesions are important in diagnosing severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection. The various cutaneous lesions that have been described so far with COVID-19 falls into four categories: exanthema (varicella-like, papulo-vesicular and morbilliform rash), vascular (chilblain-like, purpuric /petechial and livedoid lesions), urticarial and acro-papular eruption.

A 36 year old male, known case of decompensated chronic liver disease (ethanol related cirrhosis) came to the emergency department with history of itchy rash in the trunk and limbs for 7 days. There was no history of fever, cough, sore throat, loose stools or drug intake. Cutaneous examination revealed multiple maculopapular exanthematous rash with excoriation over chest, abdomen, back, arms, thighs and both lower legs. Examination of the oral cavity revealed multiple tiny erythematous macules and pinpoint enanthes over soft palate and the tongue showed evidence of candidiasis. Since endoscopy was suggested by the gastroenterologist, swabs were taken from the nasopharynx and oropharynx for COVID-19. Real-time reverse transcriptase–polymerase chain reaction for SARS-CoV-2 turned out to be positive. Most of the skin manifestations reported in literature coexist with other symptoms of COVID-19. Many patients who are confirmed or suspected to have
COVID-19 do not have their oral cavity examined due to safety concerns. In our patient, we did not suspect, as the patient did not have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19. Exantheme can occur in patients with viral infections and drug reactions. Usually, exantheme presenting as pustules and dusky lesions suggest drug etiology, whereas, petechial or vascular pattern with enantheme point towards an infectious etiology.2

In a study done by Dr Jimenez-Cauhe et al, oral cavity of 21 patients with COVID-19 and skin rash were examined, among which 6 patients had enantheme. The mean duration between onset of COVID-19 symptoms and appearance of enantheme is 12.3 days.3 Enantheme can present as petechial, macular, macular with petechiae, or erythematovesicular. Our patient had macular enantheme and itchy exantheme without other symptoms of COVID-19.

Physicians should have a high degree of suspicion when patients present with skin manifestation of exantheme rash and oral enantheme as it may be a presenting feature of COVID-19.

References