

Lymphoma non-Hodgkin or not: that is the question

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Introduction. Lymphomas are the third most common neoplasm in the head and neck region, after squamous cell carcinoma and salivary gland tumors. Non-Hodgkin lymphomas (NHL) is a malignant tumour of lymphatic tissue (B-lymphocytes). Head and neck are common sites for extranodal lymphomas. Mouth NHL usually presents as an enlarging mass, sometimes ulcerated, affecting any oral sites. Lesions are frequently asymptomatic, although they may be associated with pain or fever and weight loss.

Case Details. A 65-year-old male patient came to our service referring the development of a lump on the upper gum, noticed about 4 months before and treated by his dentist with antibiotic therapy. Intraoral clinical examination showed a pink and hard swelling, tender at palpation, with the major axes of 3 cm, at level of 12-13.

As the teeth in the area were vital, the clinical diagnosis was of inflammatory process of gingival origin. Because of the unusual presentation and the lack of response to antibiotic treatment, a biopsy was performed. The histological

diagnosis was of putative NHL, although the pathologist asked for a larger sample. For this reason a new biopsy was taken and this time the histological examination excluded the NHL diagnosis, although a definitive diagnosis was not provided. One month later, we decided to remove the whole lesion and again it was negative for NHL. During a follow up visit, a new lesion appeared in the same area: immediately a new biopsy was performed and, this time, the histological diagnosis was of NHL.

Conclusions. Although histological examination is the mainstay of diagnosis in most of the oral medicine conditions, it is not free from mistakes or limitations. Unfortunately, we have very little evidence on fallacy of histological diagnosis. Final diagnosis always depends on the team work of clinician and pathologist and on their ability to synthesize histological and clinical information.

References

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