## Giornale Italiano di Dermatologia e Venereologia EDIZIONI MINERVA MEDICA

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Giornale Italiano di Dermatologia e Venereologia 2018 Jan 24

DOI: 10.23736/S0392-0488.18.05865-0

Article type: Letter to the Editor

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Article first published online: January 24, 2018

Manuscript accepted: January 11, 2018 Manuscript received: November 24, 2017

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IMMUNOHISTOCHEMICAL PHENOTYPE

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** 

Financial support: none.

Conflicts of interests: none.

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#### Dear Editor,

neurothekeoma (NTK) was first described in 1980 by Gallagher and Helwig as a dermal tumor with close histologic resemblance to the previously described nerve sheat myxoma (NSM) (1).

This slow-growth neoplasm is usually asymptomatic, does not have a tendency to metastases, and recurrences are very un common.

It mainly affects the face and upper limbs of women between the second and third decades of life and it manifests as a solitary, well-defined, dome-shaped, and firm red papule or nodule (2).

Due to the lack of specific clinical and dermoscopic features, diagnosis is based only on histologic findings (2).

They show a nodular or multinodular lesion, typically composed of fascicles of spindle shaped to epithelioid tumor cells, with abundant eosinophilic cytoplasm and absent or sparse mucinous matrix (3).

Based on the amount of myxoid matrix NTKs are divided into myxoid, intermediate, and cellular subtypes: tumors with 10% or less of myxoid matrix are classified as cellular variants; those with more than 50% are considered myxoid ones; values from 10% to 50% are typical for intermediate NTKs (3).

The myxoid variant of NTKs has been often assimilated to the NSMs(6), even though most authors demonstrated that they are distinct entities for their different immunohistochemical characteristics, particularly for the absence of the expression of markers for neural differentiation in NTK (3). In fact immunohistochemical staining usually demonstrate positivity for CD68, vimentin, NKI/C3, and CD10 and negativity for S100 protein, glial fibrillary acidic protein (GFAP), and CD57. Therefore, it is postulated that it originates from fibroblastic cells, able to differentiate into myofibroblasts with the tendency to recruit histiocytes (3).

The negativity of nerve growth factor receptor (NGFR) was rarely discussed as another data to validated this hypotesis (4).

We report a recent case of a myxoid variant of NTK which react with antibodies anti-vimentin, CD68, and CD10; without the expression of antibodies anti-GFAP, and S100 protein (Fig.1). Surprisingly the tumor was diffusely reactive for NGFR (Fig.2).

NGFR, also known p75 neurotrophin receptor (p75NTR), or CD271, is a low-affinity receptor that belongs to the tumor necrosis factor receptor family and interacts with a variety of ligands and coreceptors to mediate a range of neurotrophin functions.

This transmembrane signaling receptor is involved in negative cell cycle regulation and is specific for neural crest origin .

NGFR is also considered a tumor stem cell marker that is shown to result in tumors when transplanted into nude or immunodeficient mice.

It was recently demostrated that it has an important role in the different stages of melanomagenesis: NGFR-positive melanoma stem cells have shown correlations with higher metastatic potential (4). Asymmetric cell division, label-retention and colony-formation are determinants of stem-like cells, as well as a high cellular plasticity. The last characteristic represents a proposed mechanism leading to intra-tumor heterogeneity for the ability of tumor-initiating cells to enter, exit and to re-enter a stem-cell state while changing their phenotype defined by expression of cell surface markers like NGFR (5).

The expression of NGFR in this benign tumor induces to not exclude a neural origin or, however, to consider the presence of a mixed cellular population of different derivations.

Finally, we must consider that the down-regulation mechanisms of NGFR, which manifests with the decrease or absence of reactivity on immunohistochemical staining, could also promote a cell-lineage switch from neural-like to mesenchymal-like, property highlighted in recent studies and already attributed to melanoma cells (5).

Figure 1. Lack of immunoreactivity for S100 protein in a case of myxoid NTK (10x magnification). Figure 2. Immunohistochemical results for NTK showing a consistent reactivity for NGFR (10x magnification).

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