



The Great Imitator Hiding in Plain Sight

Carolina Villarreal, MD¹, Silpa Yarra, MD², Andre Khazak, DO³, Gres Karim, MD⁴, Svetlana Chernyavsky, MD⁵

¹Department of Medicine, Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center. Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. New York, NY.

Introduction

- Lower gastrointestinal syphilis is a rare manifestation of early syphilis transmitted through anal contact usually occurring in men and transwomen who have sex with men.
- It can present with hematochezia, mucous discharge, tenesmus, and can mimic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).
- We present a case of intestinal syphilis in an HIV patient presenting with fevers and bloody diarrhea found to have intestinal spirochetosis.

Case Description

- A 32-year-old male with a history of untreated HIV, untreated hepatitis C, and IV drug use presented with a one-month history of worsening sharp and diffuse abdominal pain, subjective fevers, and blood-tinged mucoid bowel movements.
- Social history is significant for being a sex worker and having sex with males.
- On physical exam he was cachectic appearing with a diffusely tender abdomen. Rectal exam revealed palpable nodules and anal condylomas.

Patient Course

- He was treated with HAART and doxycycline for a presumed lymphogranuloma venereum infection.
- Computed Tomography of the abdomen pelvis showed an irregular and thick-walled rectum with perirectal soft-tissue stranding and necrotic nodes in the left perirectal region
- Colonoscopy showed scattered and patchy severe edema, erythema, and friability with shallow and deep rectal ulcerations.
- Labs revealed late latent syphilis infection (1:128 titer) and he was started on penicillin.

Discussion

- In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of syphilis, especially in men and transwomen who have sex with men.
- Lower gastrointestinal syphilis is a rare manifestation and needs to be recognized early to reduce patient morbidity and minimize community spread.

Conclusions

- Maintain a high index of suspicion for STI colitis in high-risk individuals presenting with lower gastrointestinal symptoms.

