CLINICAL SNAPSHOT

Ulcerating Herpes Simplex Infection

A 39-year-old homosexual man in good general health and good nutritional condition complained of severe pain from medically refractory perianal ulcerations that had been troubling him for five months, causing marked sexual and emotional problems. A biopsy enabled the diagnosis of herpes simplex virus (HSV) infection, which was confirmed by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis of a swabbed sample. A serologic test for syphilis was negative. Because of the unusual severity of the findings, further studies were carried out, leading to the diagnosis of an infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Mucocutaneous HSV infections are common. Morphologically, they are characterized by clusters of vesicles, which can cause tissue erosion in their further course. An HSV infection with an atypical course should arouse the suspicion of immune compromise because of an associated illness; thus, patients with ulcerating HSV infections should also be checked for HIV. In the present case, the decision to perform a biopsy was essential for establishing the correct diagnosis.

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors state that they have no conflict of interest.

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