Infliximab is a monoclonal antibody against tumour necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), is increasingly being used in the treatment of Crohn’s disease. It is generally considered to be a safe drug with only minor side effects; however, sporadic reports of severe complications have been recorded in the literature. We present the case report of a patient who developed profuse genital warts after infliximab treatment is reported. The literature is reviewed and information is presented on side effects and complications as a result of infliximab therapy.

Infliximab therapy can be associated with the gut is considered to be the main cause. Various mechanisms of action of infliximab have been proposed. Some studies suggest that it induces apoptosis of T lymphocytes and monocytes, while others indicate that it curbs the production of cytokines by the mononuclear cells in the lamina propria of the gut.

The drug has generally been found to be safe when used in clinical trials and frequently observed side effects are minor such as headache, nausea, and upper respiratory infection. Other side effects reported include delayed hypersensitivity reactions, aseptic meningitis, and necrotising fasciitis. Episodic treatment with infliximab for Crohn’s disease in adults, especially a distant second infusion, has been suggested as a risk factor for delayed hypersensitivity reactions. Other side effects reported include the development/reactivation of tuberculosis and development of antibodies to double stranded DNA in a small percentage of patients. There have been no reports, however, of a true lupus syndrome or other autoimmune disorders.

Immunosuppressive drugs, in general, can lead to opportunistic viral and other infections. Though there is no definite evidence of systemic immunosuppression in patients on infliximab, the reported instances of tuberculosis reactivation and necrotising fasciitis indicate that there might be some effect on cell mediated immunity. It may, therefore, be appropriate to treat any active infection before starting infliximab. Molluscum contagiosum, an infection caused by a pox virus, has also been reported as a result of TNF-α antibody treatment.

Condylomata acuminata are caused by infection with the human papilloma virus. Most warts are caused by human papilloma virus types 6 or 11. Genital condylomata are commonly transmitted by sexual contact. Immunosuppressive treatment, as in transplant patients, can lead to a flare up of this condition. However, rapid development of condylomata as a result of infliximab treatment has not been reported before. We have since contacted the drug manufacturer regarding this case and they do not have any reports of similar side effects. It is possible that our patient had harboured a subclinical infection with the virus, which manifested after treatment with infliximab. However, we acknowledge that there is no definite way of proving this cause based on one report. It is possible that steroid treatment could have contributed to some extent, though the patient had been on high dose steroid treatment frequently in the past, with no similar effects.
We therefore conclude that patients who are due to receive infliximab should be screened for active infection with human papilloma virus and must be treated appropriately. Patients must also be warned of the possibility of development/aggravation of anogenital warts while on infliximab therapy.

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