Preliminary observation

Biologics Offer Dramatic, but Brief, Response to Hidradenitis Suppurativa

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LAS VEGAS — Several of the new biologic therapies for psoriasis have been used to treat severe hidradenitis suppurativa at the University of Miami, resulting in dramatic, albeit temporary, improvement, Dr. Francisco Kerdel said at a dermatology seminar sponsored by the Skin Disease Education Foundation.

“These patients are improved in 48 hours. The seeds of pus disappear in almost a miraculous manner,” said Dr. Kerdel of the novel therapeutic approach.

Both infliximab, marketed as Remicade, and etanercept, marketed as Enbrel, have been used in conjunction with other drugs such as mycophenolate mofetil (CellCept) and azathioprine (Imuran) to treat the purulent inflammation of the apocrine glands, said Dr. Kerdel, professor of dermatology at the university.

Fifteen patients have been treated thus far, and have required repeat courses of therapy. Still, “The response is dramatic, and appears to be consistent.”

His remarks came in response to a case presentation of a 59-year-old woman with a 12-year history of hidradenitis suppurativa persistent in spite of multiple courses of isotretinoin and antibiotic therapy, followed by extensive surgery.

Dr. Richard Diskin, a Las Vegas dermatologist, had presented the case seeking suggestions for treatment options.

Hidradenitis suppurativa is a chronic, sometimes debilitating condition characterized by painful nodules, cysts, and sinus tracks, most often in the axilla, groin, areolar, and umbilical regions.

When other therapies fail, patients sometimes require “very mutilating” surgery with wide excision and full-thickness skin grafts, noted Dr. Henry H. Roenigk Jr. of Scottsdale, Ariz. Despite the drastic nature of the surgery, “some patients are very, very grateful,” he said.

Dr. Roenigk and others questioned what mechanism of action would explain improvement with biologicals. Dr. Kerdel replied that he believes the drugs' anti-inflammatory effect may be key. He added that he believes hidradenitis suppurativa should actually be viewed as a “follicular occlusive disease” with a great deal of inflammation.

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