

Hydroxychloroquine-induced Hyperpigmentation

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The Journal of Rheumatology November 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3899/jrheum.200138>

Hi, this is Dr. Amir Bajoghli from Dermatology and Mohs Surgery here in the Washington, D.C. area and we are presenting our case of a hydroxychloroquine-induced hyperpigmentation in an individual, a lady in her 50s, who presented with this to our dermatology clinic. She was referred by her treating physician for evaluation of systemic lupus.

We performed the biopsy and it had classic findings of drug-induced — specifically in this case, hydroxychloroquine-induced — hyperpigmentation and was quite diagnostic in her case.

It is important to know about this because of the differential diagnosis. It can look like other causes of hyperpigmentation. It can look like increased pigmentation from Addison's disease. It can look like bruising, or abuse potentially, in certain individuals, so it is an important differential diagnosis for hyperpigmentation.

Unlike the other side effects that you cannot see with hydroxychloroquine, specifically the ocular issues and rhinopathy, which are usually dose or duration dependent, in this case, this skin manifestation of hydroxychloroquine side effect is not dose or duration dependent.

Usually, it is seen in the first few years of treatment. In about probably 10–20%, and in some studies, up to 33% of individuals who are taking it can develop this hyperpigmentation, so it is important to know about. It can be quite common. It can not only involve the arms, like in our case, but it can involve the face, mucous membranes, nails, and it is important to recognize that.

Oftentimes after you stop the offending hydroxychloroquine, the hyperpigmentation improves, improves tremendously, and in some cases though, there can be areas where they do persist, despite discontinuation of the medication. So in summary, I think it is important to keep in mind when you are treating folks with hydroxychloroquine to have hyperpigmentation as a potential side effect. Recognize it and know when to educate the patient.

In our particular case, she wanted to stay on it despite this side effect. She considered it a minor issue because it was basically the only thing at this point that was helping her systemic lupus be in control. And as we all know, hydroxychloroquine can be extremely effective in treating folks with lupus and we also use it for other things in our field, including polymorphous light eruption (PMLE) and sun sensitive issue, and it has an excellent role in our armamentarium. Thanks for your attention.