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C O N T E N T S

EDITORIAL

Management of autoimmune urticaria

Arun C. Inamadar, Aparna Palit 89

VIEW POINT

Cosmetic dermatology versus cosmetology: A misnomer in need of urgent correction

Shyam B. Verma, Zoe D. Draelos 92

REVIEW ARTICLE

Psoriasiform dermatoses

Virendra N. Sehgal, Sunil Dogra, Govind Srivastava, Ashok K. Aggarwal 94



ORIGINAL ARTICLES

A study of allergen-specific IgE antibodies in Indian patients of atopic dermatitis

V. K. Somani 100

Chronic idiopathic urticaria: Comparison of clinical features with positive autologous serum skin test

George Mamatha, C. Balachandran, Prabhu Smitha 105



Autologous serum therapy in chronic urticaria: Old wine in a new bottle

A. K. Bajaj, Abir Saraswat, Amitabh Upadhyay, Rajetha Damisetty, Sandipan Dhar 109

Use of patch testing for identifying allergen causing chronic urticaria

Ashimav Deb Sharma 114

Vitiligoid lichen sclerosis: A reappraisal

Venkat Ratnam Attali, Sasi Kiran Attali 118



BRIEF REPORTS

Activated charcoal and baking soda to reduce odor associated with extensive blistering disorders

Arun Chakravarthi, C. R. Srinivas, Anil C. Mathew 122



Nevus of Ota: A series of 15 cases

Shanmuga Sekar, Maria Kuruvila, Harsha S. Pai 125



Premature ovarian failure due to cyclophosphamide: A report of four cases in dermatology practice

Vikrant A. Saoji 128

CASE REPORTS

Hand, foot and mouth disease in Nagpur

Vikrant A. Saoji 133



Non-familial multiple keratoacanthomas in a 70 year-old long-term non-progressor HIV-seropositive man

Hemanta Kumar Kar, Sunil T. Sabhnani, R. K. Gautam, P. K. Sharma, Kalpana Solanki, Meenakshi Bhardwaj 136



Late onset isotretinoin resistant acne conglobata in a patient with acromegaly

Kapil Jain, V. K. Jain, Kamal Aggarwal, Anu Bansal 139



Familial dyskeratotic comedones

M. Sendhil Kumaran, Divya Appachu, Elizabeth Jayaseelan 142



Nasal NK/T cell lymphoma presenting as a lethal midline granuloma

Vandana Mehta, C. Balachandran, Sudha Bhat, V. Geetha, Donald Fernandes



145

Childhood sclerodermatomyositis with generalized morphea

Girishkumar R. Ambade, Rachita S. Dhurat, Nitin Lade, Hemangi R. Jerajani.....



148

Subcutaneous panniculitis-like T-cell cutaneous lymphoma

Avninder Singh, Joginder Kumar, Sujala Kapur, V. Ramesh.....



151

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Using a submersible pump to clean large areas of the body with antiseptics

C. R. Srinivas



154

Peutz-Jeghers syndrome with prominent palmoplantar pigmentation

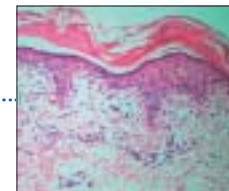
K. N. Shivaswamy, A. L. Shyamprasad, T. K. Sumathi, C. Ranganathan



154

Stratum corneum findings as clues to histological diagnosis of pityriasis lichenoides chronica

Rajiv Joshi



156

Author's reply

S. Pradeep Nair

157

Omalizumab in severe chronic urticaria

K. V. Godse.....

157

Hypothesis: The potential utility of topical eflornithine against cutaneous leishmaniasis

M. R. Namazi

158

Nodular melanoma in a skin graft site scar

A. Gnaneshwar Rao, Kamal K. Jhamnani, Chandana Konda



159

Palatal involvement in lepromatous leprosy

A. Gnaneshwar Rao, Chandana Konda, Kamal Jhamnani.....

161



Unilateral nevoid telangiectasia with no estrogen and progesterone receptors in a pediatric patient

F. Sule Afsar, Ragip Ortac, Gulden Diniz.....

163



Eruptive lichen planus in a child with celiac disease

Dipankar De, Amrinder J. Kanwar.....

164



Xerosis and pityriasis alba-like changes associated with zonisamide

Feroze Kaliyadan, Jayasree Manoj, S. Venkitakrishnan.....

165

Treatment of actinomycetoma with combination of rifampicin and co-trimoxazole

Rajiv Joshi.....

166



Author's reply

M. Ramam, Radhakrishna Bhat, Taru Garg, Vinod K. Sharma, R. Ray, M. K. Singh, U. Banerjee, C. Rajendran.....

168

Vitiligo, psoriasis and imiquimod: Fitting all into the same pathway

Bell Raj Eapen.....

169

Author's reply

Engin Şenel, Deniz Seçkin.....

169

Multiple dermatofibromas on face treated with carbon dioxide laser: The importance of laser parameters

Kabir Sardana, Vijay K. Garg.....

170

Author's reply

D. S. Krupa Shankar, A. Kushalappa, K. S. Uma, Anjay A. Pai.....

170

Alopecia areata progressing to totalis/universalis in non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (type II): Failure of dexamethasone-cyclophosphamide pulse therapy

Virendra N. Sehgal, Sambit N. Bhattacharya, Sonal Sharma, Govind Srivastava, Ashok K. Aggarwal.....

171



Subungual exostosis

Kamal Aggarwal, Sanjeev Gupta, Vijay Kumar Jain, Amit Mital, Sunita Gupta.....

173

Clinicohistopathological correlation of leprosy

Amrish N. Pandya, Hemali J. Tailor 174

RESIDENT'S PAGE

Dermatographism

Dipti Bhute, Bhavana Doshi, Sushil Pande, Sunanda Mahajan, Vidya Kharkar 177

FOCUS

Mycophenolate mofetil

Amar Surjushe, D. G. Saple 180

QUIZ

Multiple papules on the vulva

G. Raghu Rama Rao, R. Radha Rani, A. Amareswar, P. V. Krishnam
Raju, P. Raja Kumari, Y. Hari Kishan Kumar 185



E-IDVL

Net Study

Oral isotretinoin is as effective as a combination of oral isotretinoin and topical anti-acne agents in nodulocystic acne

Rajeev Dhir, Neetu P. Gehi, Reetu Agarwal, Yuvraj E. More 187

Net Case

Cutaneous diphtheria masquerading as a sexually transmitted disease

T. P. Vetrichevvel, Gajanan A. Pise, Kishan Kumar Agrawal,
Devinder Mohan Thappa 187



Net Letters

Patch test in Behcet's disease

Ülker Gül, Müzeyyen Gönül, Seray Külcü Çakmak, Arzu Kılıç 187

Cerebriform elephantiasis of the vulva following tuberculous lymphadenitis

Surajit Nayak, Basanti Acharjya, Basanti Devi, Satyadarshi Pattnaik,
Manoj Kumar Patra 188



Net Quiz

Vesicles on the tongue

Saurabh Agarwal, Krishna Gopal, Binay Kumar 188



Cosmetic dermatology versus cosmetology: A misnomer in need of urgent correction

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Key Words: Cosmetology, Cosmetologist, Cosmetic Dermatologist, Cosmetic Dermatology

Tradition is a double-edged sword. Sometimes, it is misleading. And the terminology discussed in this letter is a classic example of the ill effects of a tradition. For years we in India, for some strange reason, have used the word 'cosmetology' instead of 'cosmetic dermatology'! Like most traditions, this was never questioned and the word became widely used. Then came the day of awakening! After extensively searching literature and later during a discussion on the Internet with some members of Cosmetology Society of India (CSI), I questioned the appropriateness of the term 'cosmetology' in a dermatology setting. There was a consensus that we change the name of the society to 'Cosmetic Dermatology Society of India' with the abbreviation still remaining CSI. Hence, that procedure was initiated.

Today we see doctors' signboards and prescriptions screaming 'Dermatologist and Cosmetologist' or describing all their cosmetic procedures offered in their clinics as 'Cosmetology'. Some members of our community also talk in terms of offering courses or attending courses in 'cosmetology.' It is time to take a look at the definition of 'cosmetology' and a 'cosmetologist'. Before proceeding to discuss the definition of 'cosmetology,' it is interesting to know that the word 'cosmetology' does not exist in any of the standard dermatology textbooks read anywhere in India or outside! Logically therefore, there is no mention of 'cosmetologist' either. This being done let us now look at official definitions of these controversial terms.

'Cosmetology' is defined as 'the study of skin, hair and nails.

The services dedicated to this type of work consist of hair-shaping, manicures, pedicures, application of artificial nails, special occasion hairstyling, shampooing hair, cosmetic application, body hair removal, chemical hair relaxers or straighteners, permanent waves, coloring and highlighting of hair and hair extensions or wig treatments.^[1-3] A person who is licensed in cosmetology is called a cosmetologist.

A cosmetologist is also referred to as a beautician, a beauty specialist or an aesthetician. These persons specialize in giving beauty treatments. A general cosmetologist is proficient in all forms of beauty care and can give hair treatments, facials, skin treatments and nail treatments. This is purposeful for both men and women. There is a relative lack of mandate on qualifying as a cosmetologist or a cosmetician in India and that explains the mushrooming of beauty parlors and salons in every urban and rural nook and corner of this country. Let us now examine the issue in the context of countries where the terms "cosmetology" and "cosmetologist" are widely and correctly used. Cosmetologists need to be licensed to practise their field in USA and Europe.^[1] This licensing can be obtained by anyone over the age of 16 years and has finished high school! Some states in USA make licensing possible as early as after passing the eighth grade! Sanitation and ethical practices are emphasized upon and eventually the individual becomes a qualified cosmetologist. The USA calls these people also as 'personal appearance workers'.

It is unfortunate to note that dermatologists who are qualified physicians with a specialized qualification in dermatology

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are unwittingly degrading their status by calling themselves 'cosmetologists'. We take this opportunity to remind the community that cosmetology is a nonmedical qualification. A cosmetologist is akin to a beautician. A cosmetologist runs a commercial establishment where only beauty treatments are given by persons who have been qualified in giving beauty treatment for skin, hair and nails. We recommend that dermatologists who use the word 'cosmetology' visit the official website of the 'National Cosmetology Association', the world's largest association of salon professionals, to be reminded that it is a far cry from dermatology which has evolved as a very respectable and scientific field of medicine. It is against this background that CSI in India has changed its name to the internationally acceptable and recommended 'Cosmetic Dermatology Society of India', but still called as CSI. It is India's largest formal association of cosmetic dermatologists with over a thousand members. It is our effort to revert the current tendency to flippantly describe our cosmetic dermatological activities to 'cosmetology' or call ourselves 'cosmetologists'. Little do we realize that by doing so, we are unwittingly damaging our own reputation.

As dermatologists, we must use terms to capture the value and extent of our education and expertise. We are physicians first that care for the external aspects of the living body. We treat disease and must consider the health of the patient

when we prescribe treatments. We are not cosmetologists who care for the cosmetic appearance of the nonliving body parts such as the hair and nails. This important distinction must be consistent worldwide for dermatology to remain a highly respected field.

We did a worldwide study of over 25 well-known cosmetic dermatologists of repute and respectable standing in the field of cosmetic dermatology who uniformly agreed that the terms 'cosmetology' and 'cosmetologist' used by a dermatologist to describe himself/herself is almost pejorative, self-degrading and erroneous. It should be discarded and the correct term 'cosmetic dermatologist' should be employed.

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