

FOR SHORT ANSWERS

See p 694

FOR LONG ANSWERS

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Pigmented skin lesion

PICTURE QUIZ

A darkly pigmented lesion with recent changes

A 65 year old retired construction worker was urgently referred by his general practitioner to the dermatology clinic. He had noticed that a darkly pigmented painless lesion on his back, which had been present for two years, had recently begun to increase in size and weep blood. He had never had any similar lesions before and he was otherwise healthy.

On examination, he was noted to have a 2 cm irregular lesion on his back with dark pigmentation (figure). There was no lymphadenopathy and further skin examination was normal. All other systems examinations were unremarkable.

- 1 How should a clinician assess a patient presenting with a pigmented skin lesion?
- 2 What are the differential diagnoses and the most likely diagnosis in this patient?
- 3 How would you confirm the diagnosis?
- 4 What further procedure and investigations are useful in determining prognosis in this condition?
- 5 What is the overall prognosis in this condition?

Submitted by U Sarwar, W A Townley, M Nicolaou, and M S Khan

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STATISTICAL QUESTION

Phases of clinical trials

Researchers assessed the efficacy of nortriptyline when combined with nicotine replacement for smoking cessation. A randomised controlled trial was performed. Participants were included if they were trying to stop smoking. In total, 445 participants were randomised to nortriptyline combined with nicotine replacement and 456 to control (placebo plus nicotine replacement). The primary outcome was prolonged confirmed abstinence at six months.

Nortriptyline is an antidepressant, and although at the time of the study it was not licensed for smoking cessation, it had shown benefit in previous trials. Nicotine replacement is licensed for smoking cessation and is the most commonly used drug in this setting.

The proportion of people who achieved prolonged abstinence at six months was greater in those using nortriptyline than in those using placebo, although the difference was not statistically significant (16% v 12%; relative risk 1.34, 95% confidence interval 0.97 to 1.86). The authors concluded that although nortriptyline and nicotine replacement are effective drugs in smoking cessation, combined treatment is no more effective than either treatment alone.

Which one of the following options best describes the phase of the above clinical trial?

- a) Phase I
- b) Phase II
- c) Phase III
- d) Phase IV

Submitted by Philip Sedgwick

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CASE REPORT

Opportunistic chlamydia screening in a general practice consultation

A 24 year old woman was offered opportunistic chlamydia screening during a routine general practice appointment for another problem. It is practice protocol to offer a test for chlamydia to all patients under the age 25, and clinicians are alerted to this with a computer prompt. She had a 3 year old son but was no longer in a relationship with the father. She had been in a new relationship for the past eight months, however, and said that she occasionally used condoms in addition to oral contraception. She had been tested for chlamydia when she was pregnant but the result was negative. She accepted the screening offer and provided a self collected lower vaginal swab, which she collected in the practice toilet during the consultation. Two days later her result came back positive and she was invited back to the practice for further discussion and treatment.

- 1 Why is screening for chlamydia important in patients under the age of 25?
- 2 What complications may follow chlamydial infection?
- 3 What methods are available for testing in men and women?
- 4 What is the recommended treatment?
- 5 What other matters need to be raised during the follow-up consultation?

Submitted by Sebastian A Kalwij

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