

# Updates in Syphilis Proctitis

Elizabeth Ferzacca, MD (1); Andrea Barbieri, MD (2); Lydia Barakat, MD (3); Maria C. Olave, MD (4); Dana Dunne, MD (3)

(1) HIV/Primary Care Residency Program, Yale School of Medicine  
(2) Department of Pathology, Yale School of Medicine  
(3) Section of Infectious Diseases, Yale School of Medicine  
(4) Pathology Resident, Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, United States of America

## Background

- Syphilis infections have increased 71% since 2014
- Proctitis is a rare manifestation of early syphilis transmitted through anal intercourse
- Misdiagnosis of syphilitic proctitis as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) may result from physician under-awareness

## Methods

- We searched the literature for articles describing cases of syphilis proctitis
- We also identified cases of syphilis proctitis diagnosed within our institution
- Data were extracted from the articles and medical records and analyzed to provide a summative account

## Results

- 52 cases of syphilis proctitis were identified in 37 articles
- 8 additional cases were diagnosed at our institution, **totaling 60 cases**
- All cases of syphilis proctitis were described in men
- Age at diagnosis ranged from 15 to 73 years

# Don't miss syphilis proctitis: take a good sexual history in men presenting with lower gastrointestinal symptoms



## Results Continued...

- In 49 cases (92%) individuals endorsed sex with men
- In 27 cases (56%) individuals were HIV co-infected
- Most common presenting symptoms were hematochezia (69%) and anal pain (47%)
- Most common physical exam findings were rectal mass (41%), lymphadenopathy (33%), and rash (28%)
- Non-treponemal titers averaged 1:164 (range 1:2-1:1024)
- Of the 51 cases in which endoscopy was performed, 22 (43%) showed anorectal mass and 18 (35%) showed anorectal ulcer
- In 41 cases (72%), histopathology revealed a chronic inflammatory infiltrate, and in 18 of these 41 cases (44%), prominent lymphocytes were described
- In 38 cases (81%), tissue stain revealed spirochetes

## Conclusions

- Syphilitic proctitis should be suspected in males presenting with lower gastrointestinal symptoms
- A sexual history should be elicited and guide further testing
- Diagnostic delay due to misdiagnosis as IBD threatens patient and public health