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

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
• 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

Updates in Syphilis Proctitis
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Results Continued...
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