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Cutaneous thigh abscess secondary to melioidosis: A rare cause for a common presentation

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A 26 year old Asian male, presented with a 3x4cm, tender abscess on his left posterior thigh. The patient, born and raised in Shanghai, China – emigrated to the United States of America, aged 16. In September 2020, only upon arrival into the UK, did he develop the aforementioned cutaneous abscess.

During the incision and drainage, a wound swab was sent for culture. Using agar plates, “Burkholderia pseudomallei” was grown; a gram negative bacteria, endemic to South-East Asia, inducing an infectious condition known as ‘melioidosis’. Between January 2010 to July 2019, only 46 cases of melioidosis have been identified within the UK.^[1]

Melioidosis has a mortality rate of up to 50%, yet is significantly under-diagnosed, due to it’s wide range of clinical manifestations. Interestingly, whilst ‘abscesses’ are a recognised complication, the majority affect internal organs with only 4.9% of the 46 previously documented UK cases, reporting a ‘cutaneous lesion’ – making this case particularly rare indeed.^[1,2,3] Moreover, due it’s associations with bioterrorism – it is now a legal requirement to report all cases to Public Health England.^[1]

Cutaneous abscesses are a common presentation, seen in both community and hospital settings. In turn, this case highlights the following learning points:

1. As international travel becomes more affordable, rare, ‘imported’ diseases such as melioidosis, are likely to become more prevalent.
2. A decade long incubation period, is well recognised with melioidosis – highlighting the importance of a comprehensive travel history.
3. Utilising the microbiology department was pivotal in making a definitive diagnosis.

Biography

Hugo Espinosa-Andrews is a researcher at the Area Food technology works at the Research Center and Assistance in Technology and Design of the State of Jalisco, A.C. (CIATEJ, AC). He specializes in the areas of food colloids, food emulsions and development of delivery systems for bioactive components. His research interest includes: biopolymers, bioactive compounds, emulsion, suspensions, encapsulation techniques, nanotechnology, and delivery systems. Dr. Espinosa received his Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (Mexico City). He has published 26 scientific papers in international journals and above 60 conference proceedings. He has more than 500 citations, and his h-index is 10. He has three patent applications in PCT and seven national requests in the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property (IMPI).

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