

An irregular dark freckle-like lesion

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The diagnosis of pigmented lesions is a daily challenge in general practice. Dermatoscopy can provide extra clues, but requires significant expertise. This series will help you hone your skills.

Case presentation

Over an eight-month period, a 63-year-old man developed an irregular 1 cm diameter freckle-like lesion bounded asymmetrically by a white patch on his upper back (Figure 1). The surrounding skin had extensive freckling and evidence of chronic sun damage. Dermatoscopy revealed a pigmented lesion with a markedly irregular pigment network in a coarse and broken pattern. In the centre of the lesion the network was replaced by a pale patch containing blue-black dots and thick blue-black pigment streaks. The network merged with the surrounding mottled sun-damaged skin (Figure 2). Excision biopsy showed an epidermis with confluent proliferation of hyperchromatic small melanocytes, singly and in nests, along the junctional zone (Figure 3). Fibrosis with scattered lymphocytes was evident in the underlying dermis.

Diagnosis

This man's lesion was diagnosed as lentigo maligna with areas of regression.

Discussion

The diagnosis of early melanoma in mottled sun-damaged skin is a daily challenge in practice. Regular skin monitoring may be required to detect such lesions. Dermatoscopy was useful in this case because it highlighted a coarse and broken pigment network (reflecting the confluent proliferation of atypical melanocytes along the epidermal junction) as well as areas of regression seen as pale patches with blue-black pigment deposits. Both of these features prompted excision because they suggested a clinical diagnosis of melanoma.

Keypoint

Dermatoscopy is particularly useful in evaluating pigmented lesions that may be camouflaged by the mottled skin associated with chronic sun damage and ageing.

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Figure 1. Irregular freckle-like lesion on the patient's upper back partially outlined by an asymmetrical pale patch.

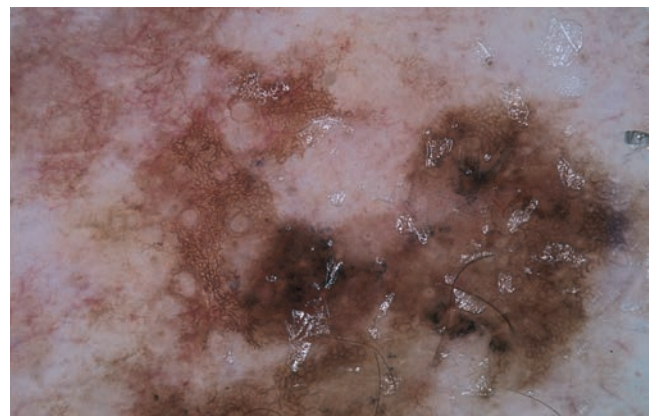


Figure 2. Dermatoscopy showing a coarse and broken pigment network with focal dark pigmentation as well as central pale areas containing blue-black pigment dots.

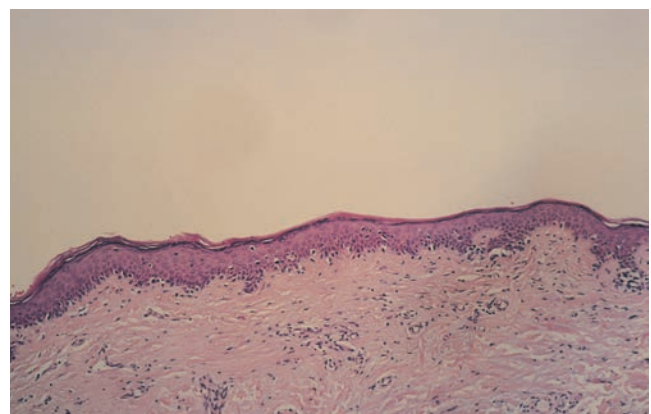


Figure 3. Skin biopsy showing a confluent proliferation of melanocytes along the epidermal junction (seen as single cells as well as nests) and underlying dermal fibrosis.

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