

A dark reticulated lesion masked by sun damage

STEVEN KOSSARD FACD

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

A 64-year-old man developed a 1.5 x 0.5 cm, irregularly shaped, pigmented lesion on his posterior left shoulder (Figure 1). He had mottled, chronic sun-damaged skin due to lifelong sun exposure. He was unaware of the presence of the lesion. Dermatoscopy revealed an asymmetrical and irregularly bordered lesion with a light to dark brown reticular pigment network (Figure 2). The network was interrupted by multiple small flesh-coloured dots. A shave biopsy showed an epidermis with well developed and deeply pigmented rete ridges forming an antler-like pattern (Figure 3). There was no increase in number of melanocytes and no evident melanocytic nests or atypia.

Diagnosis

The final diagnosis was a solar lentigo.

Discussion

A well developed reticular pigmented network may be due to increased numbers of melanocytes and/or melanin in the epidermal rete ridges. Increased melanocytes and melanin in the rete ridges are seen in naevi and in early melanoma *in situ*. Increased melanin and a normal number of melanocytes in the rete ridges can be seen in ink spot lentigines, freckles, pigmented epidermal naevi (Becker's naevus), epidermal melanosis or, as in this case, a solar lentigo.

Solar lentigines are a precursor to seborrhoeic keratoses and may rarely harbour a lentigo maligna. This possibility prompted the decision to biopsy the lesion, particularly because the surrounding skin was severely sun damaged.

Keypoint

Solar lentigines may have a well developed pigmented rete ridge system, producing a reticulated pigment network. This may be indistinguishable from that seen in some naevi or early melanomas.

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Figure 1. Irregular tan-coloured lesion on the patient's left posterior shoulder.



Figure 2. Dermatoscopy showing an irregularly bordered light to dark-brown pigment network interrupted by flesh-coloured pale dots.

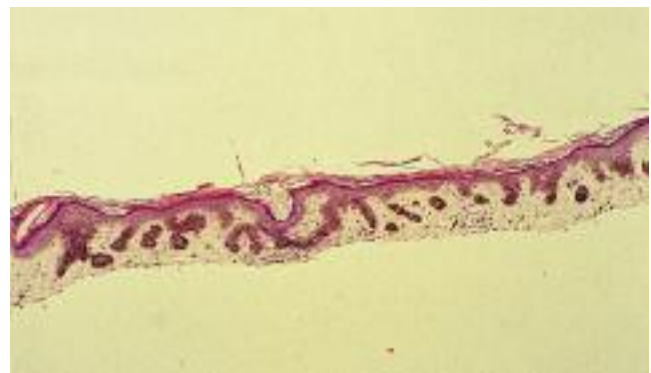


Figure 3. Skin biopsy revealing an epidermis with prominent pigmented rete ridges forming an antler-like pattern of growth.

Professor Kossard is Associate Professor, Skin and Cancer Foundation and St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst, NSW.