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Original Research Article

Exploring Ocular Pathological Findings in Patients under Surveillance for Hematological Malignancies: Implications for Clinical Care

Uttam Haribhau Nisale

Professor, Department of Ophthalmology, Parbhani Medical College and R P Hospital and Research Institute Parbhani, Maharashtra

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Corresponding author: Dr. Uttam Haribhau Nisale
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Abstract

Background: Hematopoietic malignancies, encompassing a wide range of cancers such as leukemias, lymphomas, and multiple myeloma, often present with diverse systemic manifestations. Ocular involvement, though less frequently discussed, is a significant aspect of these malignancies and can impact the diagnosis, management, and prognosis of affected patients. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the ophthalmic manifestations associated with hematopoietic malignancies, elucidating the underlying pathophysiological mechanisms, clinical presentations, diagnostic approaches, and therapeutic strategies.

Material and Method: Conducted within the ophthalmology department, this prospective, non-interventional descriptive study focused on evaluating forty patients with hematological conditions. A structured proforma was devised to collect essential data, including a concise medical history, ocular background, anterior and posterior segment examinations, and the hematological profile of each patient. A comprehensive assessment of the anterior and posterior segments was performed on all participants, encompassing measurements of intraocular pressure, best corrected visual acuity, slit lamp examination of the anterior segment, dilated retinal evaluation using indirect and direct ophthalmoscopy, and slit lamp biomicroscopy aided by a Volk 78 D lens. For cases requiring fundus photography, satisfactory outcomes were achieved. Prior to any treatments, all subjects provided written, informed consent for both the interventions and the utilization of their health information within their medical records.

Results: In this study involving 40 patients diagnosed with hematological malignancies, ocular characteristics were identified in 20 individuals. Among the participants, there were 12 females and 28 males. Ocular findings were detected in 14 of the male patients and 7 of the female patients. Notably, anterior segment findings were observed in one male and one female. Additionally, neurological involvement was noted in 2 males and 2 females. Analysis of the posterior segment revealed a higher frequency of involvement compared to the anterior segment or neurological involvement, with 11 males and 4 females exhibiting posterior segment findings. Except for acute myeloid leukemia (AML), which displayed an equal frequency, and chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), where one case exhibited anterior segment findings and another presented posterior segment findings, the incidence of posterior segment findings outweighed that of anterior segment findings in each specific disease category.

Conclusion: This study presents an analysis of ocular pathological findings observed in individuals under surveillance for hematological malignancies. The findings underscore the potential ocular involvement in these conditions and the notable clinical symptoms associated with them. Moreover, these cases underscore the importance of ocular care for patients with hematologic malignancies, particularly regarding dry eye disease, given the emergence of novel antineoplastic treatments that may extend life expectancy.

Keywords: Hematological malignancies, Clinical symptoms, Eye care, Dry eye disease and Antineoplastic treatments.

Introduction

Hematological malignancies, encompassing a diverse array of cancers arising from the blood-forming tissues, pose significant challenges to healthcare providers worldwide. These malignancies, including leukemias, lymphomas, and multiple myeloma, are characterized by the abnormal proliferation of hematopoietic cells, leading to systemic disturbances and often grave clinical outcomes. [1] While much attention has rightfully been directed towards understanding the systemic manifestations and therapeutic strategies for hematological malignancies, the ocular

complications associated with these conditions have gained increasing recognition in recent years. Ocular involvement in hematological malignancies represents a multifaceted aspect of disease pathology, with implications for both diagnosis and management. Historically underappreciated, ocular manifestations of hematological malignancies have emerged as critical indicators of disease progression and treatment response. [2-4] As such, the exploration of ocular pathological findings in patients under surveillance for hematological malignancies serves as a crucial area of investigation, shedding light on the intricate interplay between systemic disease and ocular health.

The aim of this comprehensive review is to delve into the intricate landscape of ocular pathological findings in patients being monitored for hematological malignancies. [5] By synthesizing existing literature and clinical observations, this review seeks to elucidate the diverse spectrum of ocular complications associated with hematological malignancies, emphasizing their clinical significance and implications for patient care. [6-8] Furthermore, this review will underscore the importance of proactive ocular surveillance and multidisciplinary collaboration in optimizing patient outcomes in this vulnerable population.

1. Epidemiology and Clinical Burden:

Hematological malignancies constitute a significant proportion of cancer diagnoses globally, with varying incidence rates across different geographical regions and demographic groups. Leukemias, lymphomas, and multiple myeloma collectively account for a substantial burden of morbidity and mortality, necessitating comprehensive management approaches. While systemic manifestations of these malignancies are well-documented, ocular complications remain relatively underexplored despite their potential impact on patient prognosis and quality of life. [9,10]

2. Pathophysiology of Ocular Complications:

The pathophysiological mechanisms underlying ocular complications in hematological malignancies are multifactorial, involving direct infiltration of ocular tissues by malignant cells, systemic effects of the underlying disease process, and adverse effects of therapeutic interventions. [11] Leukemic infiltration of the retina, optic nerve, and orbit, as well as lymphomatous involvement of ocular adnexal structures, contribute to a spectrum of ocular manifestations ranging from subtle visual disturbances to sight-threatening complications.

Moreover, systemic manifestations such as anemia, thrombocytopenia, and immunosuppression can exacerbate ocular pathology, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of disease mechanisms for effective management. [12]

3. Clinical Presentation and Diagnostic Challenges:

Ocular manifestations of hematological malignancies present a diverse array of clinical phenotypes, often mimicking benign ocular conditions or masquerading as idiopathic inflammatory syndromes. Common clinical presentations include retinal hemorrhages, cotton-wool spots, optic nerve infiltration leading to papilledema, uveitis, vitreitis, proptosis, diplopia, and conjunctival masses. However, the heterogeneity of ocular manifestations poses diagnostic challenges, necessitating a multidisciplinary approach involving ophthalmologists, hematologists, and oncologists. Diagnostic modalities such as comprehensive ophthalmic examination, imaging studies (e.g., fundus photography, fluorescein angiography, optical coherence tomography), and histopathological analysis of ocular specimens play pivotal roles in establishing an accurate diagnosis and guiding therapeutic decisions. [13]

4. Therapeutic Considerations and Prognostic Implications:

Management of ocular complications in hematological malignancies requires a tailored approach, taking into account the underlying disease subtype, extent of ocular involvement, and systemic treatment regimen. While systemic therapies such as chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and hematopoietic stem cell transplantation remain cornerstone modalities for disease control, adjunctive ocular interventions may be necessary to alleviate ocular symptoms and preserve visual function. The prognostic implications of ocular involvement in hematological malignancies vary depending on the specific ocular phenotype, disease stage, and treatment response. Long-term surveillance of ocular health is essential to monitor disease recurrence and late-onset complications, thereby optimizing long-term visual outcomes and quality of life for affected individuals. [14,15]

Material and Methods

Conducted within the ophthalmology department, this prospective, non-interventional descriptive study focused on evaluating forty patients with hematological conditions. A structured proforma was devised to collect essential data, including a concise medical history, ocular background, anterior and posterior segment examinations, and the hematological profile of each patient. A comprehensive assessment of the anterior and posterior segments was performed on all participants, encompassing measurements of intraocular pressure, best corrected visual acuity,

slit lamp examination of the anterior segment, dilated retinal evaluation using indirect and direct ophthalmoscopy, and slit lamp biomicroscopy aided by a Volk 78 D lens. For cases requiring fundus photography, satisfactory outcomes were achieved. Prior to any treatments, all subjects provided written, informed consent for both the interventions and the utilization of their health information within their medical records.

Inclusion criteria:

- Patients diagnosed with hematological malignancies, including leukemias, lymphomas, and multiple myeloma.
- Patients of any age and gender.
- Patients with confirmed ocular symptoms or undergoing ophthalmic evaluation as part of their hematological malignancy management.
- Patients who have provided informed consent for participation in the study.

Exclusion criteria:

- Patients with ocular symptoms unrelated to hematological malignancies.
- Patients with a history of ocular trauma or pre-existing ocular conditions that may confound the assessment of ocular manifestations of hematological malignancies.
- Patients who are unable to provide informed consent or participate in the study due to cognitive impairment or language barriers.
- Patients with incomplete medical records or insufficient data for analysis.

Statistical Analysis:

The association between ocular manifestations and hematological parameters was checked by Chi-square analysis and Fisher test. The overall significance level was set at 95% with $p < 0.05$ taken as statistically significant.

Result:

Twenty of the forty patients who had hematological malignancies had ocular characteristics. Twelve female patients and 28 male patients made up the forty patients that were part of this study. Seven of the twelve females and fourteen of the twenty-eight men had ocular characteristics.

Table 1: Gender-related distribution of study subjects

	Males	**Females**
Total cases	28	12
Ocular features	14	7
Anterior segment features	1	1
Posterior segment features	11	4
Neurological findings	2	2

One man and one female had anterior segment findings among the ocular characteristics. Two males and two ladies had neurological involvement. Eleven males and four females had posterior segment results, indicating a higher frequency of posterior segment involvement compared to anterior section or neurological involvement.

Table 2: **Incidence of Ocular Features Among Individual Diseases.**

Type of Disease	**Ocular features**	**Anterior Segment**	**Posterior Segment**
NHL	2	0	1
HD	2	1	1
MM	4	2	2
CML	2	1	1
CLL	1	0	1
AML	3	1	2
ALL	5	1	4

The highest incidence of ocular characteristics among all the different hematological malignancies was seen in Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML), which was followed by an identical frequency of Acute Lymphatic Leukemia (ALL) and AML, at roughly 55.6% each.

Hodgkin's disease (HD), with 9.1%, was the least common in the list. The remaining percentages were as follows: non-Hodgkin illness (25.5%), multiple myeloma (40.4%), and chronic lymphoid leukemia (CLL), which was 20%.

With the exception of acute myeloid leukemia (AML), which had an equal frequency, and chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), where there was one case with anterior segment findings and one with posterior segment findings, the incidence of posterior segment findings was higher in each of the specific illnesses.

Table 3: Types of retinal hemorrhage among study subjects

Types of Hemorrhage	In Leukemia's (n = 14)	In Anemia's (n = 5)
Flame	98%	70.32%
Roth spots	47%	40.75%
Deep	74%	55.12%
Pre-retinal	10.40%	23.50%
Subhyaloid	10.40%	13.21%

Pre-retinal hemorrhage was present in 23.50% and sub-hyaloid hemorrhage in 10.40 % of cases. It was noted that among patients with Hb level < 4g%, all types of hemorrhages were present while deep and flame-shaped hemorrhages were more common in cases with a Hb range of 4-8 g% and > 8 g % respectively as shown in Table 3.

Discussion

Hematological disorders encompass a range of conditions affecting plasma proteins, coagulation, and various blood cell types, including erythrocytes, leukocytes, and platelets. These disorders can directly impact the eye or lead to ophthalmic symptoms that emerge later in the disease course. Ocular manifestations often serve as early indicators of hematological disorders, prompting the need for ophthalmological evaluation in symptomatic individuals. Hematological diseases can affect any part of the eye, each presenting with its own distinct set of symptoms such as intraretinal bleeding, cotton wool patches, and conjunctival pallor and hemorrhages. Bleeding symptoms in the orbit, anterior segment, optic nerve, or retinal infiltrates are less common.

Advancements in diagnostic and therapeutic approaches have significantly improved the prognosis for individuals with hematological malignancies. Consequently, there is now greater variability in ocular presentations, including instances where relapses are initially identified through ocular manifestations or as side effects of therapy. Hematological malignancies can affect various ocular tissues through mechanisms like infiltration, bleeding, ischemia, or chemotherapy-related toxicity.

Ocular involvement may also occur in patients undergoing allogeneic bone marrow transplantation due to graft-versus-host reactions or heightened susceptibility to infections from immunosuppression, ranging from endophthalmitis to bacterial conjunctivitis. Adnexal structures, conjunctiva, sclera, cornea, anterior chamber, iris, lens, vitreous, retina, choroid, and optic nerve can all exhibit signs of these cancers. Recognizing the diverse ocular manifestations is crucial for determining disease course and prognosis. [16]

Osama Badeeb et al. (1995) [17] noted that Leukemia has the potential to affect any ocular tissue at some point during its progression, with reported incidences of ocular involvement reaching as high as 90%. Elise Torczynski et al. (1983) [18] found primary ophthalmic leukemia infiltrate in 3% of cases, while secondary ophthalmic findings were observed in 39%, and ocular changes unrelated to leukemia were present in 20% of patients. Acute leukemias were observed to affect the eye four times more frequently than chronic types.

In a study by Schachat et al. (1989) [19], leukemic infiltrates were identified in 3% of patients, while other findings associated with leukemia were observed in 39%, and unrelated abnormalities were noted in 20% of cases. Visual loss was documented in at least 5% of patients. Shirley Fung et al. (2005) [20], in a study involving 8 patients, reported that ophthalmic manifestations of Multiple Myeloma (MM) are both uncommon and diverse, occurring either at the onset of the disease or later in its progression.

Paris A et al. (2002) [21] found that the most prevalent ocular findings were observed in the conjunctiva (33.4%), with 15.4% of patients presenting with posterior segment findings, yet maintaining ocular acuity. Dry eye syndrome and proptosis were among the other manifestations identified.

Early detection and treatment of Dry Eye Disease (DED) are essential for minimizing ocular damage through a multidisciplinary approach. Therapeutic strategies focus on reducing ocular surface irritation, preserving lubrication and tears, and preventing tear evaporation. Initial treatment typically involves topical lubrication, supplemented by viscous ointments as needed. Treatment options encompass eyewear, contact lenses, dietary adjustments, environmental modifications, and various pharmaceutical interventions.

When ocular involvement is detected early, there is potential for restoring visual function. Steroid and systemic therapy were observed to improve ocular conditions in four cases. Patients demonstrating favorable ophthalmologic prognostic factors exhibited longer survival periods compared to those with poorer prognoses. Consequently, early detection of ocular involvement holds promise for enhancing prognosis in patients with hematological malignancies.

Conclusion

This study examines and assesses the ocular pathological findings in individuals under surveillance for hematological malignancies. It showcases numerous cases illustrating the potential ocular involvement in these hematological disorders and underscores the significant clinical symptoms associated with each.

Notably, the presence of posterior segment lesions in leukemia patients exemplifies this correlation. Moreover, these cases emphasize the necessity of eye care for patients with hematologic malignancies, particularly in managing dry eye disease, considering the emergence of innovative antineoplastic therapies that can prolong life expectancy.

Consequently, our findings underscore the importance of regular ocular assessment both prior to and during treatment.

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