Occipital scalp papules in a teenage boy

After a haircut, this 15-year-old boy developed papules and hair loss on the back of his head. The fact that he was African American helped us to zero in on the diagnosis.

The patient had no history of trauma or previous keloid/hypertrophic scar formation. However, he had a similar episode a year earlier after shaving the same area. During that occurrence, the papules had cleared one month after applying rubbing alcohol.

**WHAT IS YOUR DIAGNOSIS?**

**HOW WOULD YOU PROCEED?**

**FIGURE**

Keloidal papules on occipital scalp with slight crusting

Elizabeth Rafferty, MD; Robert Brodell, MD
Louisiana State University School of Medicine, Shreveport (Dr. Rafferty); University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson (Dr. Brodell); University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, New York (Dr. Brodell)

rbrodell@umc.edu

DEPARTMENT EDITOR

Richard P. Usatine, MD
University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

Dr. Brodell serves on speaker’s bureaus for 3M/Graceway Pharmaceuticals, GlaxoSmithKline/Stiefel, Dermik/BenzaClin, Galderma Laboratories LP, Medicis, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, PharmaDerm, Sanofi-Aventis, Veregen, and AbbVie. He has served as a consultant for F. Hoffman-La Roche AG and Galderma Laboratories LP and has performed multicenter clinical trials for Abbott Laboratories, Dow Pharmaceutical Sciences, Galderma Laboratories LP, and Genentech. Dr. Rafferty reported no potential conflict of interest relevant to this article.
Diagnosis: Acne keloidalis nuchae
Acne keloidalis nuchae is a chronic folliculitis that is characterized by smooth, dome-shaped papules on the posterior scalp and neck that become confluent, forming firm papules and hairless, keloid-like plaques. Seen almost exclusively in young, postpubescent African American males, the condition is often asymptomatic, although some patients complain that the affected area itches. The cause of acne keloidalis nuchae may be associated with an acute pseudofolliculitis secondary to close-shaved curly hair reentering the skin; this leads to a foreign body reaction to hair protein and subsequent fibrosis.

Differential Dx includes acne vulgaris
Acne keloidalis nuchae is diagnosed based on the appearance and location of the papules and keloid-like plaques as well as the patient's history. The differential diagnosis includes acne vulgaris, hidradenitis suppurativa, and pseudofolliculitis barbae.

- **Acne vulgaris** is a disorder of the pilosebaceous follicles primarily seen on the face, upper part of the chest, and back. Unlike acne keloidalis, it is characterized by the presence of comedones.

- **Hidradenitis suppurativa** is characterized by secondary inflammation of the apocrine glands, which produces inflamed nodules and abscesses, primarily in the axillae, groin, and anogenital region.

- **Pseudofolliculitis barbae** looks very similar to the initial presentation of acne keloidalis nuchae, and in fact, the pathophysiologic mechanism is the same. That said, pseudofolliculitis barbae occurs on the beard area and rarely produces keloidal papules.

Treat with steroids, antibiotics
Treatment of acne keloidalis nuchae is often difficult. Early treatment, however, decreases the potential for developing larger lesions and long-term disfigurement.

Topical steroid therapy is indicated for mild to moderate acne keloidalis nuchae. Application of tretinoin 0.01% gel once or twice daily for several months has an anti-inflammatory effect and alters keratinocyte differentiation, which may discharge ingrown hairs. Topical and systemic antibiotics minimize infection associated with pseudofolliculitis and have anti-inflammatory effects.

Intralesional steroid injections (triamcino- lone acetonide 2.5-5 mg/cc) with 0.1 cc injected into each lesion every 2 to 3 weeks for 3 to 6 injections can reduce inflammation and pruritus and reduce the thickness of keloidal scars. (For a how-to video that illustrates intralesional injections, go to http://www.jfponline.com/multimedia/video.html.)

Surgical management is generally reserved for large lesions that do not respond to medical management. Surgical excision with healing by secondary intention has been reported to cause fewer recurrences than surgical excision with primary closure. The use of CO₂ laser ablation can be considered for advanced cases.

Teach patients with acne keloidalis nuchae that they can prevent further irritation of the affected area by not wearing head gear that rubs on the involved area. Patients should also refrain from shaving the posterior scalp and neck to prevent the pseudofolliculitis that may be causing this condition. Electric barber trimmers that leave a short stubble but do not cleanly shave the skin are OK to use.

Our patient’s papules flattened and became asymptomatic over several months of treatment with tretinoin 0.01% gel, doxycycline 100 mg daily, and a series of biweekly intralesional steroid injections. A flat-scarred patch remained.

References