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A critical appraisal of tubercular lesions of the breast: A pathologist's perspective of diagnostic challenges

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Statement of the Problem: India is a developing country where tuberculosis (TB) is endemic with both pulmonary and extra pulmonary manifestations of the disease. Tuberculosis has been recognized as an affliction with an enormous impact in terms of morbidity, mortality and economic cost. TB affects primarily the lungs, however extra-pulmonary TB involving lymph nodes, intestine and spine are also common. TB of breast is remains extremely rare even in developing countries where pulmonary and other forms of extra pulmonary manifestations of TB are endemic. Breast tuberculosis is a rare presentation and its importance lies in the fact that it may mimic malignancy or present as inflammatory lump/abscess.

Aim: The purpose of the present study is to highlight the importance of breast TB, and its diagnostic challenges.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: It was a retrospective study conducted at Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research & associated Hakim Abdul Hamid Centenary Hospital, New Delhi, over a period of two years between 2013 and 2015 during which eight cases of breast lesions were diagnosed as tuberculosis.

Findings: Granulomas were seen in five cases while three cases revealed only few epithelioid cells. Necrosis was seen in all cases. Histopathological evaluation was available in six cases, while acid fast bacilli (AFB) were positive in three; the characteristic granulomas were seen in all the six cases.

Conclusion & Significance: Its importance lies in the fact that due to its infrequent occurrence and the chances of a mistaken identity with other disease, it entails a high index of suspicion. The disease is clinically known to simulate many diseases of breast like carcinoma, abscess, chronic granulomatous inflammation, and chronic non-specific inflammation and duct ectasia. In developing countries like India, clinical history and cyto-morphological features of epithelioid cell granulomas with or without necrosis and AFB negative on FNAC smears, a therapeutic trial of antitubercular drugs may be instituted.

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