Purpuric Nodules on a Lymphedematous Arm

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A 72-year-old woman presented with a two-month history of multiple purple lesions on her left arm. Four years earlier, she underwent modified radical mastectomy and axillary node dissection for invasive ductal carcinoma of the left breast. Left arm lymphedema developed shortly after the surgery. During a physical examination, several reddish-purple nodules were observed on the lymphedematous arm (Picture 1). We performed a skin biopsy on the nodular lesion (Picture 2, 3) and the diagnosis was Kaposi’s sarcoma.

Patients with chronic lymphedema are prone to develop bacterial, fungal and viral infections. Various tumors can develop in a chronic lymphedematous area. The most widely known is an angiosarcoma following postmastectomy lymphedema, called Stewart-Treves syndrome (1). Kaposi’s sarcoma occurring in lymphedematous skin is extremely rare (2). This might be explained by a regional cutaneous cell-mediated immunity impairment due to the disruption of lymphatic pathways in skin with long-standing lymphedema (2).

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References
