



TROPICAL DERMATOLOGY

CONNECTIVE TISSUE DISEASES IN ETHIOPIA

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Introduction: Connective tissue diseases in Ethiopia are probably underestimated; much of this population does not have access to dermatological specialists, which may result in the under-diagnosis of these autoimmune diseases.

Objective: Important differences in disease manifestations, severity of disease, and disease outcomes between different ethnic groups have been well established in many diseases. Nevertheless, there have been few studies of connective tissue diseases in Africa.

Materials and Methods: we analyzed the cases of connective tissue diseases observed at the Italian Dermatological Centre (IDC) in Mekelle and at the Maiani District Hospital (MDH) in Sheraro, Tigray Region (Ethiopia), between January 2007 and December 2016. During medical examinations doctors collect demographic and health information, clinical diagnoses have been classified by ICD-9-CM system. Clinical evaluation, if necessary, was supported by blood, instrumental, histological examinations.

Results: In the time range of our study 51,133 patients have been submitted to a first visit in IDH and MDH; 49,625 were outpatients and 1,508 were inpatients. The records revealed 374 (0.73%) patients affected by connective tissue diseases. 235 (62.8%) were lupus erythematosus (25 systemic form, 210 discoid form; medium age: 24.7 years old); 136 (36.4%) were scleroderma (medium age: 25.3 years old). We observed only 3 cases of dermatomyositis (1,3%), (medium age: 44,3 years old). All the patients affected by connective tissue diseases were treated in our Hospitals.

Conclusion: In our study we observed that skin lesions of discoid lupus are more severe in blacks than in whites. Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) often arose on chronic skin lesions on people with these diseases. In addition, cutaneous and systemic involvement in scleroderma were more severe in blacks than in whites, with a bad prognosis. Public education, and in particular education of community health workers, is important to increase preventive strategies and easier access to health care.

