



A RARE CASE OF NEONATAL MASTITIS

Neonatology

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ABSTRACT

Witch's Milk or Neonatal Milk is secreted from the breasts of some newborn infants of either sex. While it is considered a normal physiological mechanism, in some cultures, there is a tradition of removing the milk by squeezing the neonate's breast. We are reporting one such unfortunate case where this traditional practice of squeezing the breasts to express milk was practised.

KEYWORDS

Neonatal milk, Galactorrhea of newborn, Witch's milk, Neonatal mastitis

INTRODUCTION:

The term, Witch's Milk, comes from the ancient folklore that leaking fluid from a newborn's nipple was a source of nourishment for witches. It is also known as Neonatal Milk or Galactorrhea of newborn. In some cultures, there is a belief that this milk is stolen from unwatched, sleeping infants by the witches. Other cultures believe that expressing milk from the infant's breast is supposed to contribute to good breast size in adulthood. This practice is very hazardous to the newborn as it can lead to breast abscess, mastitis, sepsis etc. We recently came across a case of neonatal breast abscess admitted in the Department of Pediatrics, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, following this traditional practice.



Fig: 18-day old female with left side breast abscess

Case Report:

A 18-day old female baby was brought to pediatric emergency with complaints of redness and swelling over the left breast. On physical examination, the baby appeared sick and there was a localized swelling with inflammation over the left breast. There was an area of crust formation over the left nipple and areola complex. On further probing the history, the parents told that they squeezed the baby's breast in order to express milk. The baby was admitted in the NICU and underwent surgery by a pediatric surgeon. She was simultaneously monitored and screened for sepsis as a complication of breast abscess. Fortunately, the baby didn't develop any signs of systemic sepsis and was discharged from the hospital after 7 days without having any major complications. Prior to discharge, the parents were adequately counseled regarding the hazards of this malpractice and educated and motivated to prevent such practices in their neighbourhood.

DISCUSSION:

Galactorrhea of newborn occurs in about 5% of neonates of both sexes as a physiological response to maternal hormones. Infants with galactorrhea have significantly larger breast nodules than infants without galactorrhea. The condition occurs more commonly in term babies and very unlikely in preterm babies. The condition usually

resolves spontaneously within a few months. No treatment is necessary until the area becomes red and tender.

Our case highlights that such harmful practices are still not abolished in India, despite our nation being considered as one of the largest economies in the world. In our case, though the baby didn't develop any further complication but sepsis and mortalities are fairly common following breast abscess.

The root cause of persistence of this practice is illiteracy, superstition and lack of accessible health care. This inhumane mode of practice should be condemned by all strata of society. It is essential to provide mass education to the community regarding it.

CONCLUSION:

We admitted a baby with breast abscess following the practice of squeezing out neonatal milk/witch's milk. Fortunately, the baby was managed well and discharged successfully without any complication. Many such evil and harmful practices are still widely prevalent in India, particularly in rural areas. Providing standard and affordable health care along with mass education can mitigate such diabolical practice.

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