Facial Flushing – A Side Effect of Pulse Therapy

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According to Wilkin [1], 'flushing' reactions are physiologically and pharmacologically heterogeneous. Flushing reactions tend to occur more commonly over the face as compared to other parts of the body because of the rich blood supply and additional innervation of the face from the brain stem via the trigeminal nerve [2]. Several causes of flushing over the face have been mentioned in the standard text [2].

We have recently observed a peculiar flushing over the face in 4 patients with pemphigus vulgaris who were on dexamethasone-cyclophosphamide pulse therapy [3]. The attacks of flushing were more on the days the pulses were given as compared to 'off days'. However, there was no correlation between flushing and the number of pulses. There was no facial skin atrophy or telangiectasia in any of the 'flushers'. Their cardiovascular status was within normal limits. All other possible causes of flushing were excluded by clinical examination and the necessary investigations. To the best of our knowledge, 'facial flushing' as a side effect of pulse therapy has

not been mentioned in the literature. The probable mechanism/s could be vascular wall paralysis secondary to electrolyte alteration, hyperdynamic circulation, androgenic action of steroids [4] or metabolic alteration of mediators of flushing (kallikrein, bradykinin, substance P). However, a cause and effect relationship has yet to be established. This will require the study of a larger series of patients.

References

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