Letter to the Editor

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Vitiligo: An Early Heralding Sign of Colonic Adenocarcinoma in the Elderly?

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3 elderly patients in whom vitiligo was probably the heralding sign of colonic carcinoma are described.

A 73-year-old man in whom widespread vitiligo appeared 5 years ago was admitted to our ward because of severe constipation and diffuse abdominal pains of 3 months duration. A hard and tender mass (3×3 cm) was palpated in the left lower abdominal quadrant, subsequently diagnosed as adenocarcinoma of the sigmoid colon. Metastases to the liver were also found.

A 74-year-old man was admitted to our ward because of progressive constipation since 1 year. Widespread vitiligo appeared 4 years ago. A non resectable adenocarcinoma of the right colonic flexure with infiltration to the liver was diagnosed.

A 65-year-old woman in whom widespread vitiligo appeared 3 years ago was admitted for investigation of severe iron-deficiency anemia. The investigation revealed the presence of adenocarcinoma of the cecum with metastases to the liver.

In the elderly patient, colonic carcinoma is generally slowly growing with relatively late clinical manifestations [1]. The presence of metastatic spread in the presently reported subjects suggests that this malignant process was probably long-standing. Since the vitiligo appeared 3-5 years prior to the diagnosis of the colonic adenocarcinoma, its late occurrence in the elderly patient may be an early heralding sign of this malignancy and must alert the physician for the possibility of this process, curable when diagnosed early enough.

Reference

1 Jackman, R.J.; Beahrs, O.H.: Tumors of the large bowel (Saunders, Philadelphia 1968).