Dermatology for Nurses

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Animal Parasites

Animal parasites cause cutaneous affections quite frequently in tropical countries like India. They are usually the product of unhygienic environments, so occur mainly in areas and communities where crowding, filth and poverty prevail. Lousiness in hospital patients, bites of bed bugs and mosquitoes often come to the attention of the nurses sooner than that of the doctor. Since animal parasites can carry organisms and may be responsible for the spread of such systemic diseases as typhus (fleas, ticks and lice); plague (fleas) etc., field nurses and health visitors must be fully informed about them. In the following pages, I shall endeavour to acquaint you with the more common parasites i.e., pediculosis, scabies, fleas, bed bugs, ticks and other insects.

Pediculosis or Lice.

The Indian name is "Juau". There are three types of lice depending upon the body area affected; head, body and pubis.

Pediculosis of the head.

The female louse is about 2 mm. long and half as broad; the male is slightly smaller. They are greyish in colour. Male and female copulate and produce ova which lie in sacs (nits) which are attached to hair by bands. Ova mature into adult lice in about 2 weeks.

Children and women are more frequently affected. The back and sides of the scalp are the sites of choice. Infection is transmitted through common combs and head dress. Pediculosis, as a rule, is an index of poor hygiene. Lice traumatise the skin in search of food; traumata produce irritation with resultant scratching, scratch marks, and may be secondary pyoderma. Persistent secondary infection produces regional lymphadenitis. On examination, living lice and nits are seen. The latter are firmly attached to the hair, but can be moved along it towards the free end. Persistent impetigo and itching of the scalp must make the nurse think and look for pediculi.

There are several treatments recommended but the ones commonly used are:

1. D.D.T. emulsion—5-10 p.c. Apply about a tablespoonful of it all over the scalp by parting the hair and rubbing thoroughly. Hair is combed and washed after 24 hours. This can be repeated 2-3 times till the infection is completely eradicated.

2. Lorexane (I.C.I.). It is a very pleasant lotion to use. One tablespoonful of it is needed for one application. It is applied in the same way as the D.D.T. emulsion with the only difference that the hair is washed at the end of 7 days and the application is not to be repeated for a week.

Bed clothes, head dress and combs must be sterilised to prevent re-infection and transmission to others. Secondary complications are treated in the usual manner.

Pediculosis of the Body.

It is caused by the body louse which is longer (about 3 mm. in length) than the head louse. Life cycle is about the same. Pediculi lodge themselves in the seams of the
It is important to know that scabies is not caused by dirt, bedding, or unclean living conditions. The mites are not visible to the naked eye, so it is impossible to see them on a person’s skin. They are transmitted through close personal contact, such as sharing sleeping quarters or clothing.

The management of scabies is crucial to prevent its spread. The primary treatment is to eliminate the mites and their eggs from the skin. This can be done using over-the-counter medications, such as permethrin ( peça), or prescription medications, such as clobetasol propionate (Lotrimin) or betamethasone valerate (Fstex). These medications are applied to the skin and can be left on for several hours before being washed off.

In addition to topical medications, it is essential to wash all clothing and bedding that has come into contact with the infected person. This includes sheets, blankets, and towels. It is also important to clean the house, as the mites can survive for days in the environment.

Prevention of scabies is critical to avoid outbreaks. This includes regular handwashing, frequent handwashing, and avoiding close contact with individuals who are infected. It is also important to keep the skin clean and dry to prevent the mites from attaching themselves to the skin.

It is important to note that scabies can be effectively treated with the right medications. However, it is crucial to monitor the treatment’s effectiveness and follow any instructions provided by a healthcare professional. Regular follow-up visits and medication changes may be necessary to ensure complete resolution of the infection.