PANNICULITIS

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Panniculitis is an inflammatory disorder that primarily involves the subcutaneous fat of the body. Panniculitis presents with redness and tender painful subcutaneous nodules or plaques commonly located over the lower extremities. If severe, can affect a patient’s mobility. Individuals can also get panniculitis in the buttocks, abdomen, and breasts. This condition can affect any age group from infants to the elderly. Within the disease, there are multiple subtypes of panniculitis with various causes. Panniculitis can also present with ulcerations, hardening, or thinning of the skin depending on the subtype.

Due to multiple subtypes, there is no one definitive exact cause of the condition. The causes of panniculitis can be derived from inflammation, infection, trauma, malignancy (cancer), history of autoimmune disorder, or enzyme destruction depending on the type.

The most common form of panniculitis is erythema nodosum, which commonly presents in young women and is characteristic for tender painful nodules on the shins. Erythema nodosum is commonly associated with numerous autoimmune disorders such as sarcoidosis, Crohn’s disease, or systemic lupus.

Diagnosis of panniculitis is usually made through clinical physical examination of the lesions and detailed patient history. A skin biopsy can be taken to confirm the diagnosis for atypical presentations of the condition as well as adequate patient management measures. The physician may order other tests to check for other illness that can cause panniculitis in order to treat any underlying disease as the source of the condition.

Treatment of panniculitis is focused on supportive care, treating any underlying illnesses contributing to the symptoms, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and lastly, immunosuppressants if severe. Supportive care consists of rest and elevating the affected region and wearing compression stockings. If the condition does not resolve, is persistent, and has non-healing ulcers, then surgical removal of the nodules may be necessary. There is not a universal definitive treatment plan given to all patients. Treatment plan is curated to patient’s symptoms. Sometimes the nodules will heal on their own with no medical intervention necessary.