

CELLULITIS OR NECROTIZING FASCIITIS: A DIAGNOSTIC DILEMMA.

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INTRODUCTION:

Cellulitis and necrotizing fasciitis are soft tissue infections with similarities in presentation; however they have a very different clinical course. Cellulitis is a superficial skin infection, while necrotizing fasciitis is a potentially lethal infection of the subcutaneous tissue. Evaluation of patients with an apparent skin infection must include consideration of the criteria that distinguish each diagnosis from the other, as necrotizing fasciitis requires hospitalization, broad-spectrum antibiotic therapy, and early surgical intervention.

REPORT:

A previously healthy 41-year-old community nurse presented with itchiness and redness of her left shin for the past week. She noticed a blister on the medial aspect of the leg that increased in size each day that swelled to involve the entire leg which was associated with fever. She finally presented to the emergency department when the pain left her bedbound, unable to ambulate. Physical examination revealed pitting edema of the left leg with multiple skin blisters, excoriation, and serous discharge as well as a hemorrhagic blister at the medial aspect of the ankle. Plain radiographs of the leg revealed no gas shadows. She scored 11 points on the LRINEC Score which put her at high risk for necrotizing soft tissue infection. She was, however, started on a trial of IV C-Penicillin for a week. When her wound failed to improve with conservative management, operative debridement of the leg was done which revealed unhealthy fascia with dishwater discharge. Her condition improved post operatively and she was discharged well.



Figure 1: Clinical photograph of the limb in question.



Figure 2: Extensive debridement of the limb was carried out.

CONCLUSION:

Traditional 'red-flags' for necrotizing fasciitis must be heeded to differentiate it from cellulitis, which necessitates early surgical debridement. Clinical scoring guidelines such as the LRINEC Score increases the likelihood of accurate diagnosis and early treatment to improve patient outcomes.

REFERENCES:

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