

Special Article - Melanoma

Melanomas in Museums: Historical Highlights

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Abstract

The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary not only defines but also dates an entity with regard to *melanoma*; dark coloration is the emphasis while 1838 is the earliest date of use. A decade later, a great event was the establishment of the Pathological Society of London which began to publish its Transactions, seeing that it purposed to cultivate and promote Pathology including "models, of Morbid Parts." As these include museum models, the purpose of this paper is to document their examples of old.

Keywords: Cancer; Melanoma; Museum; History; Highlights

Introduction

The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is unique [1]. Thus, it not only defines a subject but also dates when it first came into use. With regard to *melanoma*, this is defined as "a tumor containing dark pigment" and was dated to 1838. About a decade later, the Pathological Society of London was established [2]. Principally, it was "instituted for the cultivation and promotion of Pathology, by the exhibition and description of Specimens, Drawings, Microscopic Preparations, Casts, or Models, of Morbid Parts." Not surprising was the fact that the first publication included, as I pointed out elsewhere [3], the amazing occurrence of dark melanotic deposit within the pale original kidney cancer, i.e., cancer to cancer metastasis. It remains, therefore, to give examples of cases for which the medical masters of yester years sought "an institution devoted to the procurement, care, study, and display of objects of lasting interest or value," i.e., "museum" [1].

Historical texts

1. Henry Arnott [4] in 1869 drew attention to a single woman, aged 55, who was admitted to the Middlesex Hospital. Treatment was unavailing and melanomatous growths were outstanding in skin, breast, bone, and lymph nodes. One such "mass surrounds the vermiform appendix, and another occupies the space between vagina and rectum. A minute black point, the size of a pin's head, is imbedded in the surface of the left kidney." The report ended tersely thus: "The specimens are preserved in the museum of the Middlesex Hospital."

2. J. H. Target [5] in 1891 reported a laborer aged 32 years. Admitted at Guy's Hospital. The numerous melanotic nodules were scattered over the surface of the body and the limbs. At the autopsy, the lungs and liver were found to be involved extensively. So were growths at the base of the skull and the Dura mater as well as the urinary bladder. Concerning it, there was the following:

"The specimen, which has been in Guy's Hospital Museum since 1859, is of interest on account of its extreme rarity, and supplements the cases recorded by the author in the last volume of these 'Transactions' (vol. xli, p. 180)."

3. John Cumming Mackenzie [6] in 1891 presented the case of a 75-year-old gardener. After months of treatment, he died. There

were numerous secondaries but he had the honor to bring a particular one before the Society because of its uniqueness as "a sarcoma of the pancreas, I believe, third on record." Then, the entry ended thus: "In the museum of St. Thomas's Hospital, London, there is preserved portion of a pancreas in which are about half a dozen melanotic tumours, averaging about a third of an inch in chief diameter. The specimen was from a case of melanotic disease of the eye, liver, heart, kidney, and other parts."

Discussion

The great German pathologist, Julius Cohnheim [7], was of the view that Nature so well performs as to her footsteps in the body during a disease that autopsy findings surpass the animal experimental ones. Perhaps, Godlee [8] was of the same trend of thought. Indeed, one should conclude these historical highlights as he did on an occasion thus: In general I would say that these pigmented tumours, when they fall in our way, are worthy of very careful observation. We are able to detect the first appearance of a new growth in any part, and it is evidently these very minute ones which afford the best opportunity of studying the method of development of this particular disease, and probably of throwing light on the origin and progress of sarcomata in general.

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