Idiopathic lobular granulomatous mastitis: Is it a form of terminal duct lobular unit duct ectasia?

Sir,

Duct ectasia of the female breast is a common well-known clinicopathologic entity that affects the large duct system of the breast. On the contrary, idiopathic lobular granulomatous mastitis (ILGM), is a rather uncommon and ill-defined inflammatory disease of the female breast where only 65 cases have been reported in the international English literature. It seems that this entity is not so rare in Saudi Arabia, as previously reported by us and other medical institutions in the Kingdom. Most reports suggest that ILGM is an abnormal reaction to milk as indicated by its close association with lactation and its rapid response to steroid therapy. The pathognomonic histologic criteria of ILGM is the presence of granulomatous inflammation restricted to, and respecting the mammary lobular architecture in the absence of infective etiology. This observation suggests that ILGM is probably a disease of the Terminal Duct Lobular Unit (TDLU) of the breast. We have recently reported 7 cases of ILGM from Asir Central Hospital, Abha, Saudi Arabia. During the histological review of these 7 cases, and subsequent 3 cases, we have observed the presence of dilated ducts within the TDLU of the breast with inspissated intraluminal material, intraluminal macrophages and periductal foreign body granuloma occasionally containing needle-like lipid crystals. These observations were noted in all of the 10 cases of IGLM, but with variable frequencies. This histologic observation is very similar to that of duct ectasia of the breast affecting the large duct system. Therefore, we believe that IGLM probably represents a form of duct ectasia, which affects the TDLU of the breast rather than the mammary large duct system. The questions that need answers are: Why is duct ectasia more common in the large duct system of the breast? Why does duct ectasia affect TDLU in some patients? And why does IDLG seem to be more common in developing countries compared to developed nations?

Nader A. Morad
Department of Pathology
King Saud University
P.O. Box 641, Abha
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

References