

Prevalence of skin diseases among new entrants to the medical faculty

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Abstract

Although, skin diseases are common in the community, screening for their presence is not a part of the examination when university students enter universities. Therefore, we conducted a study in a batch of new entrants to the medical faculty to determine the prevalence of skin diseases among them.

A cross sectional descriptive study was carried out in 2001 March, in 144 medical students. Demographical details were recorded using an interviewer administered questionnaire and all were examined for the presence of skin diseases.

Acne (66.67%), seborrhoeic dermatitis (57.63%) and pityriasis versicolor (27.78%) were the commonest skin conditions found to be affecting the students. We conclude that skin diseases are common among the new entrants to medical faculties. Although they do not cause great suffering to those who are affected many suffer psychologically due to the cosmetic effects of diseases. Therefore, we would like to suggest that screening for skin diseases to be included in the routine examination carried out on all new entrants to universities.

Introduction

New entrants to the medical faculty are examined by the university medical officer for the presence of many medical and surgical conditions as they enter medical faculty. However, routine examination of these students does not include screening for skin diseases. Skin diseases are one of the most common conditions affecting the population and in a recent community survey 47.6% of the population were found to be suffering from at least one type of skin disease¹. Therefore, we carried out a study to find out the prevalence of skin diseases among new entrants to the medical faculty to determine whether screening for skin diseases is important at entry to the university.

Methods

We carried out a cross sectional, descriptive study in 2001 March, in the university medical officers medical unit. 144 medical students (84 females and 60 males)

who entered the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in the year 2000 were examined for the presence of skin diseases by a group of doctors including a dermatologist, during the medical inspection done by the university medical officer. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to record the demographic details of the students and examination findings were also recorded. Informed written consent was taken from all those who participated prior to examination and confidentiality was maintained. Treatment was offered to all those who had a skin disorder.

Results

Table 1 shows the prevalence of skin disease among the population studied. Acne (66.67%), seborrhoeic dermatitis (57.63%) and pityriasis versicolor (27.78%) were the commonest skin conditions found to be affecting the students.

Ichthyosis and fissuring of soles were also very common and were seen in 20.23% of the females. Interestingly, these conditions were rare in the males. In contrast, acne was more common in males (73.3% vs 61.9% in females). Bacterial skin infections were rare and impetigo was seen only in one student.

Discussion

Our study shows that skin diseases are common among new entrants to medical faculties. However, the pattern of the prevalence of skin diseases was different from that found in the community¹ with acne, seborrhoeic dermatitis and pityriasis versicolor being the most common conditions. This may be due to the fact that the age of our study population (20-24 years) was different to that of the community. The yeast causing pityriasis versicolor is a lipophilic yeast and therefore, oily skin may be a predisposing factor for the occurrence of infection². Our population consisted of young adults who are more likely to have increased sebum production by their skin. Therefore, the increased prevalence of pityriasis versicolor among the university student population could be attributed to this.

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Table 1.

	Total Number	Prevalence	Males Number	Prevalence	Females Number	Prevalence
Skin disorder						
Diffuse Alopecia	17	11.8	1	1.66	16	19.05
Seborrhoeic Dermatitis	83	57.64	34	56.67	49	58.33
Acne	96	66.67	44	73.33	52	61.9
Dermatitis Papulosa Nigra	37	25.69	23	38.33	14	16.67
Dry skin	35	24.3	4	6.66	31	36.9
Oily skin	25	17.36	19	31.67	6	7.14
Ichthyosis	17	11.8	0	0	17	20.23
Fissuring soles	17	11.8	4	6.67	17	20.23
Viral infections						
Viral warts	10	6.94	5	8.33	5	5.95
Molluscum contagiosum	1	0.69	0	0	1	1.19
Bacterial Infections						
Impetigo	1	0.69	0	0	1	1.195
Leprosy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fungal infections						
Pityriasis versicolor	40	27.78	18	30	22	26.19
Tinea corporis	1	0.69	1	1.67	0	0
Tinea cruris	9	6.25	9	15	0	0
Intertrigo	3	2.08	2	3.33	1	1.19
Parasitic infections						
Scabies	1	0.69	0	0	1	1.19
Lice	2	1.38	0	0	2	2.38
Disorders of Nails						
Onychomycosis	5	3.47	2	3.33	3	3.57
Paronychia	2	1.38		0	2	2.38
Vitiligo	3	2.08	1	1.67	2	2.38
Papular Urticaria	16	11.11	4	6.67	12	14.28
Eczema	7	4.86	2	3.33	5	5.95

Dry skin, ichthyosis and fissuring of soles were also quite prevalent in our study population and were commonly seen among females. Most of them were from rural areas in Sri Lanka and had participated in agricultural activities prior to admission to medical faculties, which could have aggravated this condition. Surprisingly, Dermatitis Papulosa Nigricans, which is usually commoner among females, was found to be more common among males (38.33% vs 16.67%).

The prevalence of dry skin (24.3%) and alopecia (11.8%) was quite high among the population studied,

and could be attributed to the poor nutritional status. A survey done regarding the health and nutritional status of new entrants to the faculties in university of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1999 showed that 31% of the population entering medical faculties were underweight (BMK <18.5) while 38% of them were anaemic by the WHO criteria³. We do not know the nutritional status of those who had diffuse alopecia or dry skin in our study as it was not designed to determine these.

We conclude that skin diseases are common among the new entrants to medical faculty. Although

they do not cause great suffering to those who are affected many suffer psychologically due to the cosmetic effects of diseases such as acne, pityriasis versicolor. Therefore, we would like to suggest that screening for skin diseases to be included in the routine examination carried out on all new entrants to universities and appropriate treatment offered when ever necessary.

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