STRAWBERRY GINGIVITIS AS THE FIRST PRESENTING SIGN OF WEGENER’S GRANULOMATOSIS: REPORT OF A CASE


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Abstract
Wegener’s granulomatosis is a rare multi-system disease characterized by the classic triad of necrotizing granulomas affecting the upper and lower respiratory tracts, disseminated vasculitis and glomerulonephritis. Oral lesions as a presenting feature are only encountered in 2% of the cases. Hyperplastic gingival lesions or strawberry gingivitis, is a characteristic sign of Wegener’s granulomatosis. This paper discusses a case of strawberry gingivitis as the first presenting sign of Wegener’s granulomatosis affecting a 50-year-old Malay male. The differential diagnosis of red lesions that may present in the gingiva is discussed.

Key words: Wegener’s granulomatosis, strawberry gingivitis, oral lesion, systemic disease,

INTRODUCTION
Wegener’s granulomatosis is an uncommon multi-organ disease first categorized as a distinct syndrome by Friedrich Wegener in 1936 [1-3]. The hallmark of this potentially fatal disorder are necrotizing granulomatous inflammation involving the upper and lower respiratory tract, glomerulonephritis, and vasculitis [3-6]. Wegener’s granulomatosis may occur as a limited or generalized disease. The limited form of Wegener’s granulomatosis runs a milder course whereas the disseminated disease has a more aggressive course leading to life-threatening multi-organ failure [2, 7-19]. Of the 2 types of Wegener’s granulomatosis, patients with the generalized disease are known to have shorter life expectancy than those presenting with the limited disease. Renal involvement is associated with a more severe outcome for these patients [5, 8]. Wegener’s granulomatosis has an insidious onset and usually develops over a period of time with the mean period from onset of symptoms to diagnosis ranging from 4.7 to 15 months [5, 7, 9]. Without treatment it is invariably fatal and most patients do not survive more than a year after diagnosis [11-12]. Delay in the diagnosis of Wegener’s granulomatosis is attributed mostly to the nonspecific presenting signs and symptoms associated with the early phase of the disease [3-4, 8].

The most characteristic oral lesion is hyperplastic gingivitis, which is typically red to purple with many petechial haemorrhages that resemble strawberries. Recognition of this feature is of utmost importance for timely diagnosis and definitive management of this potentially fatal disease. A case of strawberry gingivitis as the first presenting sign of Wegener’s granulomatosis affecting a 50-year-old Malay male is reported here. The differential diagnosis of red lesions that may present in the gingiva is discussed.

CASE REPORT
A 50-year-old male was referred to the Oral Medicine Clinic at the Department of Oral Pathology, Oral Medicine and Periodontology, Faculty of Dentistry, University of Malaya for management of unusual gingival lesions. Accordingly, the patient first attended the Primary Dental Care Unit here for a routine dental check-up. During the course of intraoral examination, large lobulated purplish red swellings were found affecting the labial gingival mucosa extending from the distal of the right maxillary first premolar to the distal of the left maxillary central incisor (Fig. 1A). The palatal gingival mucosa was uninvolved (Fig. 1B). The patient was unaware of the onset of these swellings, and there were no associated symptoms of pain or bleeding. No other lesions were found elsewhere in the oral cavity. Panoramic radiographs did not show any evidence of underlying bony involvement. He was afebrile at the time of examination and his medical history was otherwise unremarkable.