Correspondence

Notalgia paresthetica: cryolipolysis as a novel potential treatment

Notalgia paresthetica is a neurosensory condition, usually occurring on the upper back, which often presents with localized hyperpigmentation of the affected area with associated symptoms that may include one or more of the following: burning, coldness, hypoesthesia, increased pain, pruritus, and tingling.\(^1\) Although the clinical manifestations of this condition are well characterized, an effective pathogenesis-targeted treatment remains to be established. Pagliarello et al. provided a superlative and comprehensive study of the factors associated with the perceived severity, duration, side, and localization of notalgia paresthetica.\(^2\)

Pagliarello et al. observed notalgia paresthetica to more frequently involve women, to be more severe in women, and to have longer disease duration in patients with higher body mass index. In addition, the researchers noted that the location of notalgia paresthetica was inversely related to the side that the patient slept on: specifically, it more commonly occurred on the right side of patients who slept on their left side and vis-a-verse. This latter observation prompted the investigators to suggest that the patient’s sleeping position could be a potential target for the management of notalgia paresthetica.\(^2\)

Pagliarello et al. also emphasized that notalgia paresthetica is a sensory neuropathy;\(^2\) it occurs as a result of alteration of the cutaneous sensory nerves of the upper back.\(^1,3\) In addition, they were surprised to find that only four clinical studies had investigated this hypothesis of notalgia paresthetica pathogenesis in patients with the condition.\(^4-7\) Indeed, a treatment modality that addressed this aspect of the etiology of notalgia paresthetica might be therapeutically efficacious.

I recently published an article hypothesizing the potential treatment of notalgia paresthetica that focuses on modification of the cutaneous nerves at the site of the symptoms: cryolipolysis.\(^8\) Cryolipolysis, a noninvasive procedure for subcutaneous fat layer reduction, has also been shown to not only cause a marked decrease in pain sensitivity but also a prolonged reduction in the density of both myelinated (to a greater extent because of their lipid-rich myelin sheath) and unmyelinated cutaneous nerves in the treated area.\(^3,10\) Hence, in addition to modification of patient’s sleep position, single or sequential cryolipolysis treatments – which target the suspected primary pathogenesis of notalgia paresthetica (the cutaneous sensory nerves) – may prove to be an effective treatment modality for this condition. Therefore, additional investigation into utilizing cryolipolysis for the management of notalgia paresthetica is warranted.

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