

Commentary: Topical nitrogen mustard in mycosis fungoides

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Dr. Richardson, a Fellow in the Department of Medicine with a three-month elective service in dermatology, first suggested the local use of nitrogen mustard in psoriasis. He had learned of the increased mitotic activity in epidermal biopsies in psoriasis and reasoned that local nitrogen mustard might slow down the process without producing its usual systemic side effects.

My own experience with nitrogen mustard began with an air raid in 1944 in Bari, Italy. The explosion of one of 23 ships sunk in that raid spewed nitrogen mustard over the harbor, causing not only severe local reactions but a drop in

lymphocytes as well. Our hospital (University of Minnesota 26th General) had close relationships with a much larger British hospital complex where most of the casualties were admitted, and where the effect on lymphocytes was first noted.

Because of the unusually large number of lymphocytes in the biopsies taken from our patient with mycosis fungoides, we adopted Dr. Richardson's local application technique with striking results. Parenthetically, the young man in this case report died in another institution about five years later of systemic lymphoma.

The method of treatment was slow to be adopted until Dr. Eugene J. Van Scott confirmed the effectiveness of the method, and he deserves credit for its present acceptance.

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