

Letters to the Editor

Malignant melanoma of the middle ear

Dear Sir,

We were interested to read in the December 1991 issue of the journal a case report entitled, 'Primary Mucosal Malignant Melanoma of the Middle Ear' by Sherman *et al.* The introduction to this report misleadingly indicated that cutaneous malignant melanoma of the external acoustic meatus is a relatively common condition.

'The skin of the external ear and canal is the third most common site of head and neck melanoma', is a statement of fact attributed to Conley in his series of head and neck melanomas published in 1990. Unfortunately analysis of Conley's series of 995 cases of head and neck melanomas indicates that no malignant melanomas were found in the external auditory meatus although three were situated in the middle ear.

Kagan *et al.* also describe a case of malignant melanoma of the middle ear in the case report published in 1982.

Stal *et al.* (1986) indicated that 13 per cent of head and neck melanomas occurred on the ear but agree with widespread opinion that there is a, 'direct relationship between sunlight and melanoma'.

Sylvén *et al.* (1950) in a series of 36 cases of malignant melanoma treated between 1928 and 1944, described four cases of lesions encountered in the central auricular area and included the ear canal in this category. However, photographs accompanying the text indicate the canal lesions to be situated at the canal entrance and therefore in an area exposed to sunlight. Conley (1990) exhibits a photograph of an ear canal malignant melanoma, also occurring at the canal entrance in the publication of his melanoma series but puzzlingly does not acknowledge it in his text.

In view of these reports we were surprised that you were unable to publish a report we submitted in 1991 of a malignant melanoma occurring in the deep external acoustic meatus in an area not exposed to sunlight.

To our knowledge there have been no descriptions in the literature of primary cutaneous malignant melanomas occurring in this area.

Yours faithfully,

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malignant melanoma of the middle ear. *Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, **105**: 1061–1064.

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Reply:

Dear Sir,

We read with interest the comments from Banerjee and Meikle regarding melanoma of the ear. The introductory sentence regarding the incidence of melanoma of the external ear relative to other sites in the head and neck is a statement of fact quoted from Conley's extensive series of 995 cases recorded since 1932. However, Banerjee and Meikle are right to point out that melanoma of the external meatus/canal is rare. In Conley's series, one advanced melanoma of the external canal is shown in an illustration; there were also two cases of melanoma of the middle ear (one middle ear and Eustachian tube; one Eustachian tube and nasopharynx). With regard to melanotic tumours of the pinna, 60 per cent occurred on the helix and antihelix, 7 per cent affected the lobule, 4.8 per cent behind the ear and the remaining 14 per cent were found in tissues adjacent to the external meatus (concha, tragus, pre-auricular).

Kagan and Steckel edited case details provided by Allan in a report describing a rapidly progressive extensive melanoma affecting the external canal, mastoid antrum, sigmoid plate and petrous pyramid with no other primary site.

In an extensive epidemiological study of data from worldwide Cancer Registries one melanoma was recorded out of 422 middle ear/Eustachian tube tumours (Muir and Nectoux, 1980). Thus, there do appear to be other sporadic reports of melanoma of the middle ear but, as illuminated by Banerjee and Meikle, primary melanoma of the external canal is extremely rare.

Yours faithfully,

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Muir C. S., Nectoux J. (1980) Descriptive epidemiology of malignant neoplasms of nose, nasal cavities, middle ear and accessory sinuses. *Clinical Otolaryngology*, **5**: 195–211.