

## The natural history of molluscum contagiosum in Fijian children

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### SUMMARY

A 10-month follow-up of 14 Fijian children suffering from molluscum contagiosum showed that the condition could last from about 6 months to about 3 years, but that any one lesion was present for only 2 months. There could be temporary relief from new lesions for at least 2 months; when complete remission occurred, it could be comparatively rapid. It is suggested that individual lesions should not be treated, in order to avoid scarring and because of their relatively rapid disappearance.

### INTRODUCTION

Molluscum contagiosum is a lesion affecting human skin, and occasionally conjunctiva only, and is manifested as discrete waxy papules. Each lesion starts as a small sessile papule, smooth to the touch. It progresses in typical cases to form a slightly pedunculated lesion of a firm rubbery consistency up to 5 mm. in diameter. When resolution occurs, this typical lesion becomes umbilicated and shrinks to become rough to the touch, not unlike a developing or resolving verruca vulgaris lesion.

In 1967 the present author, in association with Postlethwaite and others of Aberdeen, published a paper to show that the causative virus in Fijians and in Aberdeen was identical, that the peak for ages of onset in a series of Fijians was 2–3 years, and in Aberdeen was 10–12 years, and that in Fijians lesions were commonest on the limbs, but in Aberdeen they were more common in the axilla.

### METHODS

The previous paper (Postlethwaite *et al.* 1967) was unable to throw fresh light on the natural history of molluscum contagiosum lesions, so in 1968 the opportunity was taken to establish baselines for a longitudinal survey of a group of Fijian children suffering from the disease. During the course of a community health survey of a group of Fijian villages in the Lomanikoro area, 20 miles from Suva, the capital city, 17 cases were diagnosed as having the disease, of whom 13 were followed at approximately 10-week intervals for 10 months and a 14th for 8 months. Only these 14 will be considered in this report.

## FINDINGS

On admission to the investigation the mean age of the 14 children was 5 years, ranging from 3 years (3 children) to 11 years (1 child). The mean number of lesions was 11, with a range from 1 to 27 and a distribution similar to that described in the previous paper. The mothers of the children, or other close adult relatives, were interrogated by Mr (now Dr) Halvor Brandt of Aberdeen and an estimate obtained as to the duration of the lesions. This gave a range from 2 weeks to 2 years, with a mean of 8 months.

Four of the 14 cases were considered to have been followed to the stage of cure, no new lesions having appeared for 4 months or longer. When the stated duration of the lesions was added to the period of observation, the mean duration of the lesions was 16 months, with a range from 6 to 28 months. However, in the other 10 cases the same calculations showed the same mean duration, but with new lesions still appearing; the longest duration was in the 11-year-old who was said to have had the condition for 2 years before the beginning of the investigation and whose lesions had dropped in number from nine at the beginning to one (new) lesion 10 months later. It would appear to be not unreasonable to expect a range of 6 months to 3 years for the duration of the condition.

Observations on the duration of individual lesions showed that each one was present for only 2 months or less. An area of skin would be clear at one inspection, contain a lesion at the next and be clear at the next. Since natural resolution of a lesion proceeds without scarring, while previous investigations had shown that any interference is followed by scarring, it would seem reasonable to recommend that lesions should not be treated. In two of the children, all lesions had disappeared at one visit but new ones were present at the next visit, suggesting that final spontaneous resolution should not be prognosticated until at least 4 months have passed without new lesions appearing. A large number of lesions at one period of time did not necessarily correlate with a prolonged duration of lesions. One child's lesion counts were: 23, 37, 15, 5, 1, Nil; the original duration of lesions was reported as being 5 months. In another child, with a history of lesions for 2 years, the lesion counts were 24, 3, 7, Nil, Nil, Nil.

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## REFERENCE

- POSTLETHWAITE, R., WATT, J. A., HAWLEY, T. G., SIMPSON, I. & ADAM, H. (1967). Features of molluscum contagiosum in the north-east of Scotland and in Fijian village settlements. *Journal of Hygiene* **65**, 281.