A Man with a Chronic Painful Perianal Ulcer
(See pages 575–6 for the Photo Quiz)

Figure 1. Photograph of a chronic painful perianal ulcer, surrounded by erythema and induration, that extends to the base of the scrotum

Diagnosis: Perianal amebiasis cutis (*Entamoeba histolytica*). Examination of biopsy specimens from the perianal ulcer revealed the presence of invasive *E. histolytica* (figures 1–3). Concurrent colonoscopy findings and examination of rectal biopsy specimens also showed focal proctitis with invasive amebic parasites. No pathologic evidence of Crohn disease or ulcerative colitis was seen. Tests for HIV, *Neisseria gonorrhea*, *Chlamydia trachomatis* (including lymphogranuloma venereum serovars), *Treponema pallidum*, and *Herpes simplex* had negative results. The patient’s ulcer and symptoms rapidly resolved with a 2-week course of metronidazole. Because the patient was lost to follow-up, he did not receive paromomycin at the end of treatment.

Cutaneous amebiasis is an uncommon manifestation of *E. histolytica* infection, even in areas where it is endemic. The infectious trophozoites that normally invade colonic tissue can infect the perineal skin by 2 routes: shedding in stool (particularly in diaper-wearing children) or direct extension from involved gastrointestinal tract [1]. Perineal skin involvement may extend to the penis, scrotum, vulva, clitoris, and vagina [2]. Other reported cutaneous locations include the skin around prior colostomy, laparotomy, or drained amebic liver abscess sites [3]. In rare instances, primary cutaneous amebiasis can occur by direct trophozoite inoculation of the skin through scratching or through sexual intercourse, without contiguous extension of gastrointestinal disease [4].

The typical cutaneous amebiasis lesion is a well-demarcated ulcer with purulent exudate, raised borders, and an erythematous halo [2, 5]. The ulcers are generally painful and bleed easily. Its appearance, particularly in the perianal region, can mimic inflammatory bowel disease, malignancy, or ulcerative infections, such as infection due to herpes simplex virus, making diagnosis challenging. Diagnosis can be made by direct biopsy of the skin lesion to visualize characteristic amebic trophozoites, which are 10–60 μm in diameter, spherical or oval shaped with a single nucleus, and characterized by phagocytized RBCs within the cytoplasm [6]. Rapid resolution of cutaneous lesions occurs with metronidazole therapy [1, 2], which ideally
should be followed by a course of a luminal amebicide, such as paromomycin.

Although E. histolytica infection is rare in the developed world, penetrative anal sex and oral-anal intercourse are 2 risk factors for acquisition [7, 8]. Our patient developed perianal cutaneous amebiasis as an extension from colonic amebiasis.

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References


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Figure 2. Hematoxylin and eosin stain of a biopsy specimen from the perianal ulcer showing multiple amebic trophozoites (arrows) (original magnification, ×200).

Figure 3. Hematoxylin and eosin stain of a trophozoite of Entamoeba histolytica (arrow) with intracellular phagocytized RBCs (original magnification, ×200).