Clinical picture

Sister Mary Joseph’s nodule

A 79-year-old lady was referred to hospital with a raised INR. She was found to have a mass protruding from her umbilicus (Figure 1). She had not presented with it previously and had no other symptoms. Her past history included breast cancer 20 years previously for which she had a partial mastectomy.

CT scan showed metastatic disease with hepatosplenic and bowel infiltration, and diffuse disease in the peritoneal cavity. The disease had spread to the anterior abdominal wall and formed a subcutaneous nodule that eroded through the umbilicus, confirming a Sister Mary Joseph nodule (Figure 2). Biopsies demonstrated high grade ovarian serous cystadenocarcinoma.

A Sister Mary Joseph nodule is a mass protruding through the umbilicus due to the spread of malignancy. It was named after Sister Mary Joseph Dempsey who was the surgical assistant at St Mary’s Hospital in Minnesota, USA, who observed the phenomenon while working with Dr William Mayo, founder of the Mayo clinic. Common primary sources are gastrointestinal and genitourinary (mainly gynaecological) malignancies. The malignancy may spread via transperitoneal, haematogenous, lymphatic, or along the route of umbilical or falciform ligaments. This sign is associated with advanced peritoneal disease and poor prognosis.

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References