

What are those growth on the penis?

The two areas of the skin that causes the most distress, when inflicted by disease are the face and the genitals. Skin diseases of the face is widely talked about, however, diseases in the genital region tend to be dismissed as being an STI. Men usually get lumps and bumps on the penis and most of the time reach their own conclusions, without getting professional help. This can lead to them suffering in silence. However, this should not be the case and some of the conditions commonly encountered in my clinic will be discussed below.

'Pearly penile papule' was discussed previously and will be mentioned briefly. It presents as small 1-5mm finger-like growth on the glans penis and can affect up to 30% of males. It is considered to be a normal variation and no treatment is required.

Epidermal cysts can occur almost anywhere in the genital region. They tend to get inflamed and discharge a pungent cheesy material. These cysts can be very painful and need to be surgically excised. A median raphe represents the midline embryonic joining point of two symmetrical tissues. In men, there is a median raphe which starts from the anus, forward through the perineum, scrotum and extending along the underside of the penis. This raphe is normally visible and palpable. Usually a single papule representing a single cyst is present. This is present from birth and may not be noticed till adulthood. It is mainly asymptomatic and rarely gets inflamed as a result of trauma or infection. Some men can have multiple cysts.

Prominent sebaceous glands are common, skin coloured to yellow, grouped papules commonly located proximally on the penile shafts. Small number of these glands can be found anywhere on the penile shaft. They have no medical significance and should be left alone.

A pyogenic granuloma is a small red nodule that can bleed easily. It is an overgrowth of tissues containing abnormal blood vessels. It can start following some sort of trauma or due to unknown causes and can become infected and bleed if disturbed. Cure is obtained by excision or laser therapy.

There are many other papules and nodules that can occur on the penile shaft. A folliculitis is quite commonly seen and results from the inflammation or infection of the superficial portion of the hair follicles on the penis. It can present as one or a few red to yellow papules around a hair follicle and break easily. Folliculitis occurs due to a bacterial infection (usually staph or pseudomonas), fungus or simply due to irritation. It can affect any age group.

Furunculosis is the inflammation of the deeper portion of the hair follicles forming a red "boil". It presents as one or several painful nodules that can drain pus. Some heal while others continue to appear. Few patients can even develop fever and malaise. These lesions can appear anywhere in the groin and is very tender when on the penis. Early use of antibiotics and draining of the nodules is the treatment of choice.

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a viral infection and can be easily mistaken as warts. The virus can be spread from sexual contact or from lesions on other body parts. It presents as small

umbilicated papules and tend to multiply quickly. In our experience, early treatment with podophyllin, cantharidin or even use of cryotherapy gives the best results.

Bowenoid papulosis presents as brown papules on the penile shaft. It is a variant of an intraepithelial neoplasia with the possibility of progressing to a squamous cell carcinoma. This type of lesions occurs in young men and can regress spontaneously. Bowenoid papulosis is not very common and is associated with the human papillomavirus as well as immunosuppression and smoking.

Warts can present as small discrete papules to large cauliflower like lesions. They are mostly sexually transmitted and very resistant to treatment. These lesions are very infectious and caused by the HPV virus, which can lead to cancer in both men and women. Therefore, the partner needs to be examined and a pap-smear needs to be done. Current therapy for their treatment includes podophyllin, bleomycin, imiquimod and many other destructive therapies. A new approach using immunotherapy using a certain M. leprae vaccine has shown excellent result in India.

Kaposi's sarcoma is very common in our population. It is almost exclusively seen in men who are HIV positive with low CD4 counts. It can present as a tan to red plaque or nodules on the penis. Advance disease can result in lymphedema of the penis. Kaposi's sarcoma is a low grade cancer that responds to ARVs, however one should consider radiotherapy or chemotherapy in advanced cases. A good history and examination of other parts of the body does help in reaching a diagnosis.

The incidence of nodular scabies is increasing to the high prevalence of HIV. It is basically a hypersensitivity reaction to scabies mite. It presents as multiple erythematous nodules on the scrotum and penis, usually weeks or months after successful treatment of generalised scabies. These lesions can present as quite a challenge to diagnose and treat and one may need a biopsy as well as a thorough history.

There are several other lumps and bumps that can occur on the penile skin and one should not always label them as STIs. A good history, examination and correlation with skin diseases on other parts of the body are very helpful. Why can't somebody get a skin disease on the genital area that usually occurs elsewhere? If in doubt, perform a biopsy or refer to a skin specialist.

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