

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus or a Mimic?

Authors: Nivine El-Hor MD, Hanan Ibrahim, MD, Firas Askar, MD, Ayad Alkhatib, MD, Sufiya Hussain, MD

Introduction:

Infections such as syphilis can mimic rheumatologic diseases at presentation. Here, we report a case of syphilis presenting with symptoms seen in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)/antiphospholipid syndrome (APS).

Case:

34 year-old-male with past medical history of NSTEMI x3 (2015), left MCA stroke (2021) due to mitral valve thrombus presented to rheumatology clinic for new evaluation of SLE/APS in the setting of inflammatory arthritis, worsening vision and oral ulcers.

Ophthalmology exam revealed bilateral uveitis. Patient was found to have + ANA, + RPR and + anti-cardiolipin antibodies. Physical exam showed condyloma lata, patchy alopecia, hyperpigmented macules on the palms and soles, oral mucosal lesions. He began treatment for neurosyphilis with IV penicillin G for 14 days with improvement of symptoms.

Figure 1



Oral Ulcers



Papulosquamous lesions on soles



Patchy Alopecia

Conclusions:

It is important for health care providers to keep a broad differential and rule out infections that can mimic rheumatologic diseases prior to committing patients to immunosuppressive regimens.