Review paper

THE SKIN IN SYSTEMIC SCLEROSIS

M.L. Cagnoni and T. Lotti

ABSTRACT

Systemic sclerosis is a systemic disease of unknown etiology which has both cutaneous and systemic manifestations. This disorder is often preceded or accompanied by Raynaud's syndrome.

Patients affected by chronic systemic sclerosis may present many cutaneous manifestations like pigmentary changes and vascular lesions including panniculitis, erythema nodosum, livedo reticularis, atrophie blanche or ulcerations that are often indicative of a specific phase of the disease.

In very rare cases systemic sclerosis may occur without any cutaneous symptoms, while more frequently patients present different pattern of cutaneous involvement.

Cutaneous involvement has been divided into three groups: the first group is characterized by an involvement of acral regions, the second group includes disorders which start distally and the third group is characterized by generalized cutaneous sclerosis.

KEY WORDS

systemic sclerosis (SSc), skin, connective tissue.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss the most recent data concerning the affected skin in systemic sclerosis (SSc) as described in the recent issue of Clinics in Dermatology, reviewed by Lotti and Matucci-Cerinic. From the dermatological point of view patients have been divided into three groups according to the peculiar characteristics.

A GENERAL REVIEW AND OUR OBSERVATIONS

The first group includes over 50 % of the patients. Here the disease typically involves the skin of the acral portions of the extremities which show scleroatrophic lesions on the fingers and occasionally also on the toes (sclerodactyly) (Fig. 1). The forearms and the face can be affected and gradually the upper extremities can be involved. Frequently scattered