

Terra Firma-Forme Dermatitis

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An otherwise healthy 13 year old girl was brought to a dermatology clinic for asymptomatic reticulate brownish patches distributed over her arms, neck, and neckline areas [Figures 1A and 1B]. The lesions had appeared 3 years earlier and the parents tried daily showers with

soap and water with no results. A firm rubbing of the lesions with 70% isopropyl alcohol removed the pigmentation, confirming the suspicion of terra firma-forme dermatosis (TFFD). The mother was given instructions to remove all of the lesions at home with isopropyl alcohol.

TFFD, also known as Duncan's dirty dermatosis, is a benign but cosmetically distressing skin condition characterized by asymptomatic black-brownish, dirt-like plaques that cannot be removed by bathing with water or rubbed off with soap [1-3]. TFFD occurs in patients of all ages, with some reports of a higher incidence in

children and young adults [1,2]. It usually involves the neck and trunk areas. The etiology is unclear; however, many believe that this condition is caused by delayed keratinocyte maturation, which leads to the retention of keratinocytes and melanin within the epidermis [1,3].

The diagnosis is confirmed by forcefully rubbing with a gauze pad immersed in 70% isopropyl alcohol. After wiping, normal pink skin is exposed. Clinical differential diagnoses include acanthosis nigricans, confluent and reticulated papillomatosis, and dermatosis neglecta [3]. Most of these disorders can be excluded from diagnosis by the rapid removal of pigmentation with an alcohol pad.

Awareness of TFFD and a prompt diagnosis prevents unnecessary laboratory workup, biopsy, or medications. Reassurance regarding the benign nature of this entity and its effective treatment by application of isopropyl alcohol are advised to affected patients.

Figure 1. Brown and dirt-like dermatosis on the left upper limb [A] and neckline [B]



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“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world”

Anne Frank, (1929–1945), German-born diarist. One of the most discussed Jewish victims of the Holocaust, she gained fame posthumously following the publication of *The Diary of a Young Girl*, in which she documents her life in hiding from 1942 to 1944, during the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II