Plantar Ulcers and Eyebrow-Hair Paucity
(See pages 684–5 for the Photo Quiz)

Figure 1. Photograph showing the hyperkeratotic area and pus-secreting sinuses on the plantar aspect of the right foot

Diagnosis: Chronic osteomyelitis secondary to leprosy-induced peripheral neuropathy.

Leprosy is one of the oldest diseases known to afflict humans. Descriptions of the disease are present in ancient Indian texts (dating from the 6th century B.C.) and in the Bible. The causative agent is *Mycobacterium leprae*, acid-fast bacilli that grows best in cooler areas of the body, such as the skin and eyes. Leprosy is a chronic granulomatous infection of the skin and the peripheral nerves [1]. Our patient’s clinical manifestations were mainly secondary to peripheral nerve damage and included reduced sweating, ulnar palsy, and chronic painless leg ulcer with secondary chronic osteomyelitis (figure 1). The photographs of the patient’s face demonstrate the lack of eyebrows and eyelashes (figure 2) and the presence of a saddle nose (figure 3), which is a result of the bacillary infiltration of the nasal mucosa. Both changes are typical of leprosy, and they appeared during our patient’s military service, 25 years prior to his admission to the hospital. The radiograph of the patient’s right foot (figure 4) demonstrates classic neuropathic changes associated with leprosy, including bone resorption with “licked candy” appearance and distal phalangeal resorption. The third and fourth metatarsal phalangeal joints are completely destroyed. Sclerosis, bone resorption, and cystic changes in the distal first metatarsal bone are due to chronic osteomyelitis [2, 3].
Figure 2. Photograph of the patient’s eye, demonstrating the lack of eyebrow and eyelashes.

Figure 3. Photograph of the patient’s profile, demonstrating saddle nose deformity.

Figure 4. Antero-posterior radiograph of the right foot, demonstrating bone resorption in the metatarsals and phalanges (white arrow heads) and sclerosis in the first metatarsal head due to secondary infection (white arrow).
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References