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Male gynecomastia

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Background & Aim: Gynecomastia is characterized by enlargement of the male breast, caused by glandular proliferation and fat deposition. It is the most common benign breast condition in males and occurs in all age groups, affecting at least 30% of men. Since it causes emotional distress, fear of breast cancer and psychosocial discomfort, patients usually seek medical attention. Early diagnostic evaluation is important to rule out serious illness. The aim of this work is to review the pathophysiology, etiology, clinical evaluation and treatment of gynecomastia.

Method: Literature search was undertaken in February 2016 in textbooks and Pubmed database of review articles with free full text published between 2011 and 2016 in portuguese and english, using the MeSH terms “Male Gynecomastia”.

Results: of the 26 articles that met the inclusion criteria, 5 were relevant to this work. Gynecomastia results from a hormonal imbalance between estrogens and androgens. Physiologic gynecomastia is common in newborns, adolescents, and older men and usually is self-limited. The etiology of nonphysiologic gynecomastia is attributed to chronic conditions (renal insufficiency, cirrhosis, hypogonadism); use of medications, supplements or illicit drugs; and, rarely, tumors. The evaluation of gynecomastia includes a detailed medical history, clinical examination, specific blood tests, imaging and tissue sampling. Treatment should be individually oriented and early implemented. Weight loss, management of underlying disease and discontinue use of contributing medications are the basis of treatment. Estrogen receptor modulators and surgical correction are indicated in the treatment of select patients. The main aim of any intervention is to exclude serious etiological factors and relieve the symptoms.

Conclusions: Gynecomastia is a prevalent condition caused by several etiological factors. The family doctor must be capable to confirm the diagnosis, search for a specific cause, exclude serious illness and referral to specialized care, when needed.