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Think beyond the initial diagnosis

Ana Filipa Vilaça(1), V Peixoto(1), AF Pimentel(1), A Martins(2), F Guimarães(3)

(1) USF Manuel Rocha Peixoto, Family Medicine, Braga, Portugal

(2) USF São Lourenço, Family Medicine, Braga, Portugal

(3) USF Santa Clara, Family Medicine, Vila do Conde, Portugal

Corresponding author: Miss Ana Filipa Vilaça, USF Manuel Rocha Peixoto, Department of General and Family Medicine, Braga, Portugal. E-mail: filipavilaca3@gmail.com

Background and Aim: Deep venous thrombosis (DVT) is a clinical entity associated with a prothrombotic state, abnormal blood flow or endothelial dysfunction. The family physician should be able to recognise signs and symptoms of DVT. Occasionally, DVT can be the first manifestation of another disease.

Method: We present the clinical case of CMF, 80 years old, retired, independent for activities of daily living, unitary family, with personal history of arterial hypertension, atrial fibrillation (hypocoagulated with warfarin) and peripheral venous insufficiency. She complained of pain on her right lower member with marked inflammatory signs on her thigh. The dorsalis pedis pulses were present bilaterally. Based on this findings, we assumed the clinical diagnosis of deep venous thrombosis and prescribed analgesia. Afterwards, we verified the international normalized ratio (which was 12). Because the clinical signs were getting worst she was sent to the urgency department five days after. On the ultrasound it was visible an extensive occlusive thrombosis throughout the left internal saphenous, corroborating the previous clinical diagnosis. On follow-up evaluation she presented with weight loss of 17% and marked anorexia. We decided to do imaging study which revealed a large heterogeneous mass in the liver, latter confirmed as a hepatocellular carcinoma. Without curative treatment possible according to oncologist decision, the family doctor started following the patient with home-based palliative care and emotional support.

Conclusions: The family doctor should have a comprehensive approach with longitudinal continuity. In the present case, this enabled him to look beyond the initial diagnosis and integrate different manifestations of a single disease. At primary care the physician manages and co-ordinates different levels of care. Faced with an unexpected diagnosis of terminal disease, the physician should be prepared to communicate and explain the prognosis to the patient and family as well as support them during the palliative process.