

DISAPPEARANCE OF RECURRENT MAMMARY CARCINOMA AFTER REMOVAL OF THE OVARIES*

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THE remarkable changes, described by Beatson, which the removal of the ovaries brought about in mammary cancer; amounting at times to complete disappearance of the new growth, have also been observed by other surgeons, and about ten years ago the author reported a series of seven cases of his own. As a rule, the improvement, though striking, was but temporary; but in a few cases cures have been claimed.

The case presented to-day differs from the others in the fact that, when the ovaries were removed, the patient was not suffering from mammary carcinoma but from recurrent nodes in the skin and subcutaneous connective tissue that had appeared in the neighborhood of the site of an operation for carcinoma of the breast performed about four and one-half years previously.

Mrs. S., fifty-seven years old, was operated upon by me for carcinoma of the breast more than five years ago. The large area of skin transplantation visible now gives proof that the excision of skin was very extensive and that we had to deal with an advanced case. A scar extended up into the neck furthermore shows that the cervical glands were removed at the same time.

The patient returned to the German Hospital in March, 1913, suffering from fibromyoma of the uterus, and she was placed on the gynæcological division in the service of Dr. Gustave Seeligmann. On being examined she called attention to the fact that she had observed a number of nodes growing near the site of the former operation. The case was kindly shown to me and we saw the well-known characteristic picture of recurrent nodes, some of them larger than a finger tip rather close to the old scar, some smaller ones farther away. The larger ones were slightly reddened, the smaller ones had not changed color. At least a dozen of these were counted.

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The question came up whether, in the presence of these metastases, it was worth while to operate upon the fibromyoma. On the basis of my former experience with Beatson's operation I expressed myself in favor of it. A panhysterectomy with removal of both ovaries was performed by Dr. Seeligmann, after which the patient made an uninterrupted recovery and left the hospital. We saw nothing more of her until December 3, about 8½ months after the operation, when a member of the house staff who had seen her, kindly referred her to me. Not a trace of the nodes can be found; they have completely disappeared.

In my series of cases formerly reported there was improvement in every case; in one of them the growth disappeared almost completely. The tumors, however, began to grow again after the lapse of six or seven months, sometimes sooner, in every case except one. In that case the tumor, which had been firmly fixed to the chest wall, became so loose that I performed the radical breast operation about two months after the removal of the ovaries. I saw that patient as late as fifteen months after the operation without any signs of a recurrence that I could detect. She was then suffering from severe headaches, and a few months later I heard that she had died suddenly. I am unable to say whether she died from a metastasis within the skull or from some entirely different ailment. It is possible, therefore, that there was one cured case among my former series.

The effect of castration upon mammary carcinoma had always been ascribed to some peculiar relation between the ovaries and the milk glands. The carcinomatous nodes in the present case were in the skin and subcutaneous tissue and had not appeared until more than four years after the breast had been removed. It had also been claimed by some that Beatson's operation is most likely to do good in women who are still in their menstrual life. In my former series, however, the best result, the almost complete temporary disappearance of the tumor, occurred in a woman who had passed the menopause. In this respect the present case stands in a rather unique position, for, although she is fifty-seven years old, she menstruated regularly up to the time when her ovaries and uterus were removed.

It seems that the operation of castration in these cases should not be entirely relegated to the heap of therapeutic rubbish, where most of us have placed it, but should be remembered in cases where we are unable to do anything better.