Pseudomembranous Colitis in a Patient Treated with Paclitaxel for Carcinoma of the Breast: A Case Report

P Ang,*, MBBS, M Med (Int Med), MRCP (UK), W K Cheong,**, FAMS, M Med (Int Med), MRCP (UK), K S Khoo,*** FAMS, M Med (Int Med), MRCP (UK)

Introduction: The concomitant antimicrobial properties of antineoplastic agents may play a role in causing pseudomembranous colitis, which has been documented for cisplatin, cyclophosphamide and 5-fluorouracil. Clinical Picture: We describe the first case reported in the English literature of severe pseudomembranous colitis occurring in a patient given paclitaxel as adjuvant chemotherapy for breast cancer. There was no prior antibiotic therapy. Stool culture confirmed Clostridium difficile. Treatment: Oral vancomycin, metronidazole and cholestyramine led to prompt improvement of intestinal symptoms, which resolved in two weeks. Outcome: Repeat colonoscopy performed 3 months later showed total resolution of the colitis. Conclusions: Awareness of pseudomembranous colitis after paclitaxel chemotherapy can avert life-threatening complications.

Key words: Chemotherapy, Clostridium difficile, Colonoscopy, Diarrhoea


* Registrar
** Consultant
*** Consultant
   Department of Medical Oncology
   National Cancer Centre
** Consultant
   Department of Gastroenterology
   Singapore General Hospital
Address for Reprints: Dr Peter Ang, Department of Medical Oncology, National Cancer Centre, 11 Hospital Drive, Singapore 169610.
E-mail: dmoacs@nccs.com.sg