Red Scalp
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Red scalp disease is a common complaint and therapeutic challenge encountered in daily clinical practice. was originally reported by Thstrup-Pedersen and Hjorth in 1987 and subsequently commented on by Moschella in 1994 who described the difficult problem of ‘diffuse red scalp disease which can also be itchy and burning, is nonresponsive to any therapy including potent topical steroids or antiseborrheic therapy’. By definition, the complaint cannot be related to any specific dermatologic disease typically affecting the scalp on careful examination, such as eczema or psoriasis. Later, Grimalt presented findings in 18 patients with ‘red scalp syndrome’ at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the EHRS, and found an association with hair loss due to androgenetic alopecia in the majority of cases, leading to speculations over the role of chronic UV exposure of the balding scalp. Moreover, dilated and tortuous vessels are typically found in photodamaged skin. Other pathogenetic speculations have concerned perifollicular inflammation and increased expression of the neuropeptide substance P in the vicinity of affected hair follicles. These findings suggest a connection between sensory or subjective irritation and cutaneous vascular reactivity. More recently, we found a correlation of telangiectasia of the scalp with the presence of scalp discomfort, and proposed an analogy to the observation that patients with a telangiectactic type of rosacea respond more frequently with stinging sensations to the topical application of 5% lactic acid on the cheeks than patients with the papulopustular type of rosacea or normal controls. Eventually, our observation of two cases of red scalp disease with clinical and histopathologic findings consistent with rosacea and response to oral tetracycline therapy suggest that at least a subset of patients with red scalp represent a rosacea-like dermatosis of the scalp. Besides oral tetracycline therapy, topical corticosteroids are to be prevented, and patients are to be recommended protection of the scalp from UV exposure.

Further Reading