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JOURNAL ARTICLE

Accidental radiation exposure and azoospermia

G. Bezold, P. Gottlober, H. Gall and R. U. Peter
Department of Dermatology, University of Ulm, Germany.

Seven Georgian male soldiers (19-25 years old) had accidentally been exposed to radiation by Cs-137 between April 1996 and May 1997. No information about the exact time and duration of exposure was available. All patients presented with the subacute stage of Cutaneous Radiation Syndrome with deep painful ulcers on different body sites, predominantly on the legs. Semen analyses showed complete azoospermia in 4 patients, with elevated follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) in 3 and elevated luteinizing hormone (LH) in 2 of them. One patient had severe oligozoospermia of 7 million sperm per mL, with normal sperm motility and morphology; his FSH and LH levels were elevated. One patient had complete normozoospermia, and the seventh patient had polyzoospermia of 340 million per mL; both of these patients had normal serum hormone levels. Only the patient with oligozoospermia reported a history of delayed testicular descent; his physical examination showed relatively soft and small testicles and a varicocele with considerable reflux. The physical andrological examinations were normal in the other 6 patients. It is very likely that the azoospermia in the 4 patients can be attributed to the radiation accident. In conclusion, it is essential to perform andrological examinations in patients who have been exposed to radiation even if there are only cutaneous injuries detectable, as a high percentage of them can show azoospermia.

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