Hodgkin's Disease Encyclopedia Article

Hodgkin's Disease

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Hodgkin's Disease

Hodgkin's disease is a cancerous enlargement of the lymph nodes, spleen, and other lymphoid tissue. Examples of the syndrome were first recorded by the Italian physician Marcello Malpighi in 1666, but it was an English physician, Thomas Hodgkin (1798-1866), who first described the disease in detail in 1832.

Born in London in 1798, Hodgkin received his medical degree in 1821 from the University of Edinburgh and served as lecturer on morbid anatomy at Guy's Hospital in London from 1825 to 1837. Hodgkin introduced the use of the newly invented stethoscope to Great Britain from the Continent and promoted the importance of postmortem examination. Passed over for an appointment as assistant physician at Guy's, Hodgkin, a Quaker, devoted increasing amounts of time in his later years to philanthropic and humanitarian concerns. He died of dysentery in Jaffa on a mission to Palestine in 1866.

Hodgkin's interest in postmortem investigations led to the presentation of a paper in 1832 titled "On Some Morbid Appearances of the Absorbent Glands and Spleen" describing a particular type of lymphoma characterized by swollen lymph tissue. The importance of this paper wasn't recognized until 1856, when the English doctor Samuel Wilks redescribed the condition and named it Hodgkin's disease.

Hodgkin's disease is distinguished from other conditions that cause lymphatic tissue swelling by the presence of giant, mostly multi-nuclear, cells. These Sternberg-Reed cells were first recorded by pathologists Carl Sternberg (Germany) in 1898 and Dorothy Reed (U.S.) in 1902.

Hodgkin's disease occurs primarily between the ages of 15 and 35 and after the age of 55. Once almost certainly fatal, Hodgkin's disease can now, for the most part, be successfully treated, especially if it is discovered in the early stages. The standard therapy combines radiation and chemotherapy. Clinical trials are also being conducted using bone marrow transplants as an adjuvant therapy. The transplants are designed to replace bone marrow which may have been destroyed by chemotherapy, thus compromising the patient's immune system. Ironically, immune deficiency may be a risk factor for acquiring Hodgkin's disease. As a result, it is often found in patients with the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS.