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A case series of malignant melanoma of the conjunctiva at St. Luke's Cancer Institute

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Background: Malignant melanoma of the conjunctiva is a rare condition, representing only 1.6% of all noncutaneous melanomas and 2.5% of all ocular malignancies. It usually presents as a unilateral, raised, pigmented or non-pigmented lesion that arises from a previously unblemished area, from a pre-existing nevus, or from a non-elevated, spreading pigmentation of primary acquired melanosis with atypia, and the tumor is often located in the bulbar conjunctiva. Local and systemic metastases can occur, with a potential to cause sight and life-threatening consequences.

Patients: This paper describes two cases of malignant melanoma of the conjunctiva seen at the Ambulatory Care Unit of St. Luke's Cancer Institute. Both cases presented with a unilateral, pigmented lesion, with no known precursor lesions. Both cases were illustrated differently, as to its tumor location, type of surgery, and treatment.

Discussion: Tumor location, adequate surgical margins, and post-operative treatment are important factors that determine prognosis for patients with conjunctival melanoma. Combined treatment modalities such as surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy are emphasized to decrease the risk for local and systemic metastases. Other systemic agents, aside from chemotherapy, are available for metastatic melanoma. Patients with conjunctival melanoma, whether in the adjuvant or metastatic setting, should be followed up for life.

Conclusion: Malignant melanoma of the conjunctiva is a rare condition. Prognosis is poor for patients with malignant melanoma in the palpebral conjunctiva, fornices, and caruncle. This case series puts emphasis on the need for early, immediate, and appropriate intervention in the management of conjunctival melanoma. Close follow-up is mandatory. Development of a multidisciplinary approach is crucial in the management of conjunctival melanoma.

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