

# Of Pills and Pillows: Pseudopigmentation in a Patient Taking Amiodarone

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*Blue discoloration of the skin can alarm patients and physicians alike. Blue coloring may, however, have a trivial and easily correctable cause, as is shown in the following case.*

## Case Report

A 61-year-old man with cirrhosis and congestive heart failure, who was taking 200 mg of amiodarone daily for paroxysmal atrial fibrillation, was seen for a routine clinic visit on a snowy January morning. He had noted that same morning that his hands looked blue and his wife had observed that his face had a similar cast. Examination confirmed that the skin of his palms, face, and bald scalp was indeed blue and also that this alarming color could be removed by cleansing the areas with an alcohol swab. The effects of cleansing are seen in Figure 1, and the effect of this process on an alcohol swab is shown in Figure 2. The patient had not worn a blue cap or mittens, hence, the source of the blue was initially a mystery. The source was later determined to be a new blue pillowcase.

## Comment

Amiodarone can cause a blue-gray pigmentation of sun-exposed skin. Discoloration, which is only some-

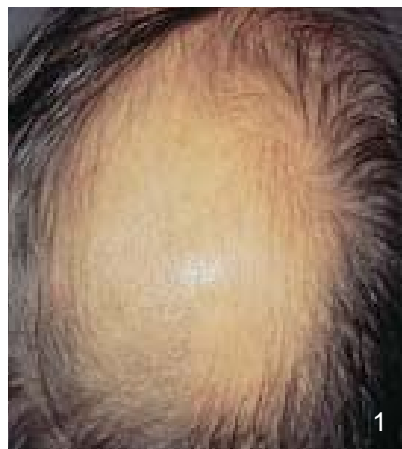
times reversible, is associated with both the dose and duration of the drug's use.<sup>1</sup> The patient presented here had blue pigmentation of his hands and face, which at first glance was suggestive of amiodarone toxicity. However, his palms, rather than the backs of his hands, were affected, and the time of year was also wrong for a sun-related problem. His amiodarone dose was also lower than that usually associated with this complication.

Pseudocyanosis of the hands from exposure to textile dye has been described<sup>2,3</sup> and was known to the author because of his connections with one of the centers where that phenomenon was observed. Such discoloration of the skin may, of course, affect more than the hands and, as this case shows, may mimic the distribution of skin pigmentation seen with amiodarone. Awareness of this phenomenon, and of the diagnostic versatility of an alcohol swab, may solve a medical mystery to the amusement and relief of all involved.

## REFERENCES

1. Blackshear JL, Randle HW. Reversibility of blue-gray cutaneous discoloration from amiodarone. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 1991;66:721-726.
2. Berger DM. The extraordinary case of the blue hands. *JAMA.* 1974;229:522-523.
3. Darnell JC. Blue hands and pseudocyanosis. *Ann Intern Med.* 1976;84:617.

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**FIGURE 1.** Blue discoloration of the scalp is seen at the left. The skin to the right has been cleansed.



**FIGURE 2.** Blue pillowcase dye is seen on the cleansing swab.