

# Letter to the Editor

## Erythema Nodosum Currently Is Not a Proven Complication of Jellyfish Stings

Dear *Cutis*<sup>®</sup>:

The article, "Aquatic Antagonists: Portuguese Man-of-war (*Physalia physalis*)" (*Cutis*. 2007;80:186-188), commented that erythema nodosum was reported following jellyfish envenomation in an article from *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*.<sup>1</sup> Auerbach and Hays<sup>1</sup> did not mention in the abstract that the patient did not see the jellyfish sting her, did not feel pain, did not develop an eruption for more than a day, was not seen by a dermatologist, and never had a lesional biopsy. These negative points found in the text of the article leave the diagnosis of jellyfish-induced erythema nodosum open to question.

Erythema nodosum is a clinical complex caused by a number of diseases. The acceptance of an entity as a cause should be rigidly controlled to prevent physicians from jumping to the wrong diagnosis. Because no documented cases of jellyfish-induced erythema nodosum have been reported in the past 20 years, the link between jellyfish stings and erythema nodosum is absent. Despite these facts, *The Journal of Emergency Medicine* article has been listed as an etiology for erythema nodosum in journal and text reviews. The book *Poisonous and Venomous Marine Animals: A Medical and Biological Handbook* classifies jellyfish-induced erythema nodosum as a mystery syndrome because of its nebulous causality, which appears to be a reasonable step, pending further corroboration.<sup>2</sup>

Sincerely,  
Joseph W. Burnett, MD  
Baltimore, Maryland

The author reports no conflict of interest.

### REFERENCES

1. Auerbach PS, Hays JT. Erythema nodosum following a jellyfish sting. *J Emerg Med*. 1987;5:487-491.
2. Williamson JA, Fenner PJ, Burnett JW, et al, eds. *Poisonous and Venomous Marine Animals: A Medical and Biological Handbook*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press; 1996.

### Author Response

The likely association of erythema nodosum and Portuguese man-of-war (*Physalia physalis*) was based on the patient's serologic response. Serologic testing demonstrated marked elevation of IgG and IgM against *P physalis*, suggesting that the jellyfish was indeed Portuguese man-of-war.<sup>1</sup>

Sincerely,  
Dirk M. Elston, MD  
Danville, Pennsylvania

The author reports no conflict of interest.

### REFERENCE

1. Auerbach PS, Hays JT. Erythema nodosum following a jellyfish sting. *J Emerg Med*. 1987;5:487-491.