**Evaluation of clinical results from trichloroacetic acid on the treatment of focal epithelial hyperplasia**

Eilen Tovío Martínez1, Mauricio Espítatela Mejía1, Zoila Carbonell Muñoz2. Luz Luna Ricardo3, Jonathan Harris Ricardo4.

1Student, Faculty of Dentistry, University of Cartagena, Colombia, 2Full Professor, Department of Oral Medicine, University of Cartagena, Colombia, 3Full Professor, Department of Pediatric Dentistry, University of Cartagena, Colombia. 4Department of Oral Surgery, Corporación Universitaria Rafael Núñez and University of Cartagena, Colombia.

CORRESPONDENCE: The suggested contact address is Jonathan Harris Ricardo. Neighborhood los Alpes transversal 74 #31 G 53, Cartagena - Colombia. Phone 057 + 3012470762. Email j.harris.r@hotmail.com

**Abstract**

Focal Epithelial Hyperplasia (FEH) is a benign disease characterized by the presence of multiple papules in the oral mucosa, associated with the human papilloma virus, serotypes 13 and 32, it is very common in the pediatric population, without treatment the injuries can persist for many years, implying that patients will show injuries throughout childhood and youth, generating oral and psychosocial problems such as rejection. The clinical case of a pediatric patient with FEH is reported in which the use of 80% trichloroacetic acid (TCA) is used as an alternative therapy, the acid was applied every 10 days with the complete elimination of the lesions in the tenth session. There were no complications, the patient was calm during the treatment, without anxiety or fear. The purpose of the paper is to describe the sequence of application of the TCA and its effectiveness in the resolution of the lesions produced by the FEH.

**Keywords:** Focal Epithelial Hyperplasia, Papillomavirus infections, Trichloroacetic acid.

**Introduction**

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is a non-encapsulated virus with a double circular DNA chain, it is part of the Papillomaviridae family and has an affinity for the squamous cells of the epithelium of the genital tract, buccal and nasal cavity [1]. The result of the infection is the formation of several cutaneous and mucosal pathologies, benign growth such as focal epithelial hyperplasia, buccal condyloma acuminata, vulgar warts and malignant transformation into squamous cell carcinoma [2].

Focal epithelial hyperplasia (FEH) is a benign pathology that commonly affects children, with a predominance for females [3], the first case was described in 1965 by Heck et al. in Greenland [4]. Regarding the prevalence in the Colombian territory, it is more frequent in some departments such as Antioquia and Chocó, González et al. evaluated the clinical, histopathological and virological findings in patients with FEH in 18 patients from Antioquia [3], Rodríguez et al. reported 12 cases in Amazonas [4], Harris et al. evaluated 11 cases of FEH patients in Cartagena [5], Rodríguez Toro studied the histopathological findings of 17 specimens of FEH patients from Bogotá, Tunja, Sogamoso, Quibdó and Armenia [6], showing a wide diffusion in Colombia.

Regarding the etiology, it has been associated with malnutrition, poor hygiene and genetic factors, however through hybridization techniques, it has been possible to isolate the different HPV serotypes and a close relationship with subtypes 13 and 32 has been found [7]. Bertolotti et al. reviewed a large study that establishes an important relationship with allogenic HLA-DR4, frequently found in Native Americans, evidencing that an alteration in the specific immune response makes this population more susceptible to HPV viral subpopulations [8].

FEH presents clinically as multiple papules with a sessile base, smooth surface, the covering mucosa becomes pale pink and in some cases whitish, due to keratinization by trauma, the size varies between 3 and 10 mm in diameter, the lesions are usually located in the labial, jugal and tongue mucosa, asymptomatic and slow-growing. It is unusual to find it on the palate, floor of mouth and oropharynx, so far no malignancy has been reported [9].

The histopathological study shows marked acanthosis and junction of the epidermal projections, in the superficial stratum spinosum, a reticular aspect is observed, produced by the hydropic degeneration of the koilocytotic cells, in addition large binucleated cells and light or moderate parakeratosis can be found and, in some cases, an increase in the number of mitosis. The underlying connective tissue may expose a slight mononuclear inflammatory infiltrate in the lamina propria [10].

Treatment options include surgical resection, application of 0.05-0.1% acid vitamin A, imiquimod, electrocoagulation, CO2 laser and 80% trichloroacetic acid (TCA), the latter showing good results, the lesions may resolve spontaneously without therapy, but may persist for months or years, generating functional and aesthetic problems in the oral cavity [5,11].

The trichloroacetic acid (TCA) is derived from acetic acid, composed of carbon, chlorine, oxygen and hydrogen, causes a keratolytic and cauterizing effect, causing denaturation, precipitation and destruction of the lesions through chemical coagulation, observing a decrease in the diameter and height of the lesions [5,12]. The destructive nature of the product often extends beyond the superficial lesion to attack underlying viral infections with elimination rates of 70-80%, and the low risk of systemic absorption allows for safe application during pregnancy. The depth of necrosis is related to the concentration of TCA, it can lead to pain or burning sensation, which is eliminated with the application of a buffering substance composed of sodium bicarbonate to neutralize the acid [12].

The purpose of the present case report is to describe the technique of trichloroacetic acid application in lesions caused by focal epithelial hyperplasia and its effectiveness as a treatment.

**Case report**

A 10-year-old female patient, who was referred by Pediatric Dentistry to the Stomatology and Oral Surgery service, for presenting papillomatous exophytic lesions on the labial mucosa. The family history reported high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes mellitus, breast cancer and as a very associated fact to the pathology, the mother reports that the younger sister has common warts, located at the level of hands, distal and middle phalanges; the personal medical history and review of organs and systems do not report alterations, with apparently normal nutritional status.

During the extraoral clinical examination no papillomatous lesions related to the pathology or clinical alterations were found. At the stomatological examination, there were multiple well-defined papules with a soft consistency on palpation, sessile base with the same color of the mucosa, of approximately 3-7 mm in diameter, asymptomatic, located in the upper and lower labial mucosa, and right and left jugal mucosa, of etiology and unknown time of evolution (Figure 1).

With a previous signing of informed consent by the mother and the patient, an excisional biopsy was performed on one of the lesions of the lower left labial mucosa and sent for histopathological study. The results of the report described cuts that revealed an oral mucosa covered by mature squamous epithelium, keratinized, hyperplastic, presence of koilocytes, inflammatory chorion, no malignancy was observed in the sample evaluated (Figure 2), findings compatible with focal epithelial hyperplasia without dysplasia. In a multidisciplinary meeting and with the consent of the parents it was decided as treatment, the application of 80% trichloroacetic acid.

The application of TCA in pediatric patients follows strict measures of protection and biosafety, requiring controlled and specific interventions of affected areas, through the technique to say, to show, to do, the patient is instructed, emphasizing that in case of any perception of discomfort, she should raise her hand to neutralize the acid, relative isolation is placed on the floor of the mouth and bottom of the vestibule to decrease the salivary flow and avoid contact of the TCA in the rest of the oral cavity.

The acid was applied with cotton swabs previously sterilized, a swab was moistened with TCA, then drained and then gently rubbed onto one of the lesions for 90 seconds or until the patient indicated some discomfort, on this stage of the procedure, a scarlet-white color is observed on the surface of the lesion as a result of the coagulant, hemostatic and caustic action of the TCA, after which the acid in the treated area was neutralized with the solution composed of sodium bicarbonate powder and distilled water. The process was repeated in each of the lesions (Figure 3A and 3B).

Clinical control was performed at 10 days and a decrease in the size and height of the lesions and absence of ulcerative lesions was observed, followed by application with the acid, following the above mentioned therapeutic technique, every 10 days with their respective clinical controls until the resolution of the lesions was observed.

In total, 10 applications were performed, on the last control the affected oral mucosa was observed without papillomatous lesions and showing characteristics of a normal mucosa (Figure 4A and 4B), after 2 months of the application with the acid, there is no evidence of relapse.

**Discussion**

Topical application of TCA to infections caused by human papillomavirus is reported with high frequency. Pezeshkpoor et al. carried out a comparative study applying 80% and 35% TCA as a treatment for common warts on the skin, with 80% concentration being more effective [13], Taner et al. evaluated TCA as a treatment in genital and perianal warts, showing good results [14]; but the reports of its application in the oral cavity are few, being important the investigations referring to TCA applications in infections originated by HPV in oral cavity.

Pezeshkpoor et al. claim that TCA is a caustic agent, which could only be used for treatment of many HPV-induced lesions, since other treatments such as surgery, electrocoagulation, CO2 laser, among others can be very traumatic because of the number and extend of the lesions [13]; in agreement with the present report, in which TCA was applied in pediatric patients with severe FEH manifestations, the lesions were located throughout the oral mucosa, affecting upper and lower labial mucosa, and left and right jugal mucosa, the patient tolerated well the treatment and without complications.

Pérez et al. in the Dermatology service of the children’s hospital of the Instituto Materno-Infantil of the State of Mexico, describe that one of the therapeutic management in FEH is the application of 35-80% TCA, repeating the applications with the acid at fortnightly or monthly intervals until the disappearance of the lesions, reporting a complete resolution between four and five sessions, they affirm that the surgical option is not contemplated because of the trauma generated in the surgical act [15]; coinciding with the therapeutic policies of FEH in the dental clinics of pre and postgraduate of the School of Dentistry of the University of Cartagena, Colombia. In the current report, 80% TCA was applied on patients with HEF, showing a complete resolution of the lesions after ten sessions, it should be noted that the lesions with a larger diameter and height, required more applications with acid than those of smaller size, the patient showed no discomfort and showed good adherence to the treatment.

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