

## **An Unusual Complication of Rheumatoid Arthritis of the Elderly**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** The chronic and localized lymphedema of the limbs are exceptionally reported during rheumatoid arthritis. We report a new observation.

**Case report:** A 63-year-old woman has been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) since 6 years ago in front of inflammatory polyarthritis of the large and small joints, bilateral carpal fusion and a highly positive rheumatoid factor. She was treated with hydroxychloroquine 200 mg/day, prednisone 10 mg/day and methotrexate 10 mg/week with a good clinical and biological evolution; she had presented for two years a swelling of the left upper limb. The physical examination showed a total, painless and elastic infiltrated member covered with a stretched and shiny skin but of normal appearance. The remainder of the somatic examination was without abnormalities, in particular no tumor syndrome, no axillary lymphadenopathy or palpable venous cords. Biology showed no abnormalities, especially no inflammatory syndrome, no abnormalities in blood count, muscle enzymes at normal levels and negative immunological status. Standard X-rays of the thorax bones were without lesions. The thoracic CT scan was normal, as well as ultrasound of the soft tissues and the axilla. Echo-mammography was normal. The marked nano-colloid lympho-scintigraphy concluded that there was no visualization of the left superficial

lymphatic network. The diagnosis of localized lymphedema of the left upper limb associated with RA was held back by the negativity of the etiological assessment. Physiotherapy with lymphatic drainage was prescribed then a mini bolus of methylprednisolone due to the non-improvement under physiotherapy.

**Comments and conclusion:** Localized chronic lymphedema of the limbs is exceptional during RA. Their pathophysiological mechanisms are still poorly understood; a local defect of the lymphatic circulation is proved during this pathology. The treatment is not unanimous yet.