Dear Editor;

Nicolau syndrome was described by Nicolau with an intramuscular injection of Bismuth salt for the treatment of syphilis.1 Severe pain at injection area and discoloration after the injection are the main features of this syndrome. This iatrogenic complication may be the result of intravenous, intramuscular, intraarticular or subcutaneous injections.2-6 The most terrible symptom is paralysis of the lower extremities because of sciatic nerve ischemia.7 The author’s report is a male patient who was referred to our clinic with necrosis on his buttock.

A 56-years-old male patient received to our clinic with an 8x3 cm necrosis on his right buttock due to intramuscular injection of diclofenac at another center (Figure 1). He was treated with diclofenac because of muscle pains on his back. Local cold or hot application was not concerned by the patient. His medical history was taken and routine blood tests were performed. Surgical debridement was done with local anesthesia and he was followed with moist dressings daily. At the end of the 15th day the wound was healed with unfavorable scar.

Nicolau syndrome (embolia cutis medicamentosa) is an iatrogenic syndrome that starts with severe pain at the injection site and then discoloration of the effected skin. The color change can be turn into different thickness necrosis.

The etiopathogenesis of the disease is not clarified yet. But several hypotheses have been suggested for this unfortunate complication. Vasospasm due to needle prick, embolisation of the injected drug is some of these hypotheses.8

The diagnosis of the disease is based on only physical examination. Biopsy is consists of classic tissue necrosis. Ultrasonography or magnetic resonance can be helpful for extension of the necrotic tissues.9

Early treatment is important for avoiding the extra necrosis. Cooling the area can aggravate the symptoms. Hyperbaric oxygen, thrombolytic agents, intralesional corticosteroids are just a few of the treatment options.9 We have done surgical debridement of the necrosis. We believe that early cleaning of the necrotic tissues can promote wound healing and reduce inflammation.

Nicolau syndrome is a rare complication of drug injection procedures. This syndrome could be considered in patients presenting with tissue necrosis.


