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Beware the ingrowing toenail: it could kill!

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Background: Pleomorphic liposarcoma, which accounts for 5% of all liposarcoma diagnoses, is an uncommon subtype of soft tissue sarcoma. Although this has been well described as occurring in the thigh, to our knowledge a high grade pleomorphic liposarcoma of the great toe has never been described in the literature.

Patient and Method: A 57 year old lady presented with a persistent, painless swelling of the left great toe which her general practitioner had been treating as an in-growing toenail for 5 years. Clinically, the mass encapsulated the great toe and invaded the first webspace and second toe. A diagnosis of grade two pleomorphic liposarcoma was made following assessment by magnetic resonance imaging and biopsy. The patient has since been treated with pre-operative radiotherapy and first ray amputation, with sparing of the second ray. A second resection showed no evidence of residual tumour within the foot.

Conclusions: Soft tissue sarcoma is a rare diagnosis, accounting for approximately 1% of all adult malignancies. As a result, an atypical history involving a growing soft tissue mass should alert the health professional to a potential diagnosis of soft tissue sarcoma. A high index of suspicion is required by clinicians when presented with a soft tissue mass in order to promptly diagnose and treat such a potentially fatal lesion.

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