Perplexing but Common Skin Disorders Seen in Primary Care

Stephanie Mengden, MD
Associate Professor, OHSU Department of Dermatology

33rd Annual Internal Medicine Review
Sentinel Hotel, Portland, OR
May 15th, 2026

I have no conflicts of interest

- Off-label therapy will be discussed

OHSU

Goals / Learning Objectives

- Case-based presentation of conundrums
- Learn how to recognize potentially confounding presentations of common (and less common) skin disorders
- Review sample cognitive error
- Discuss morphologic distinctions in the differential diagnosis of inflammatory, infectious, and neoplastic

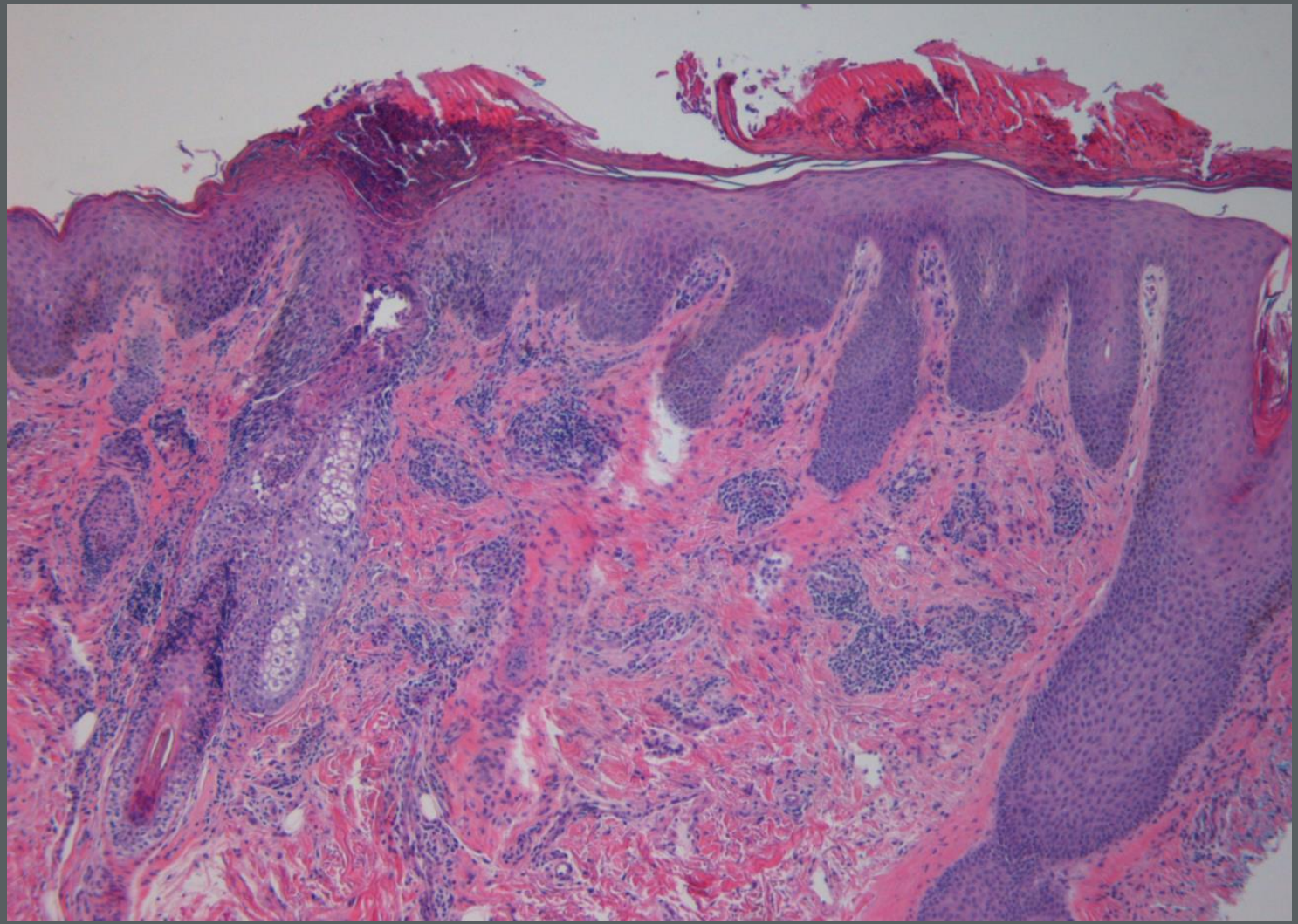
Case 1

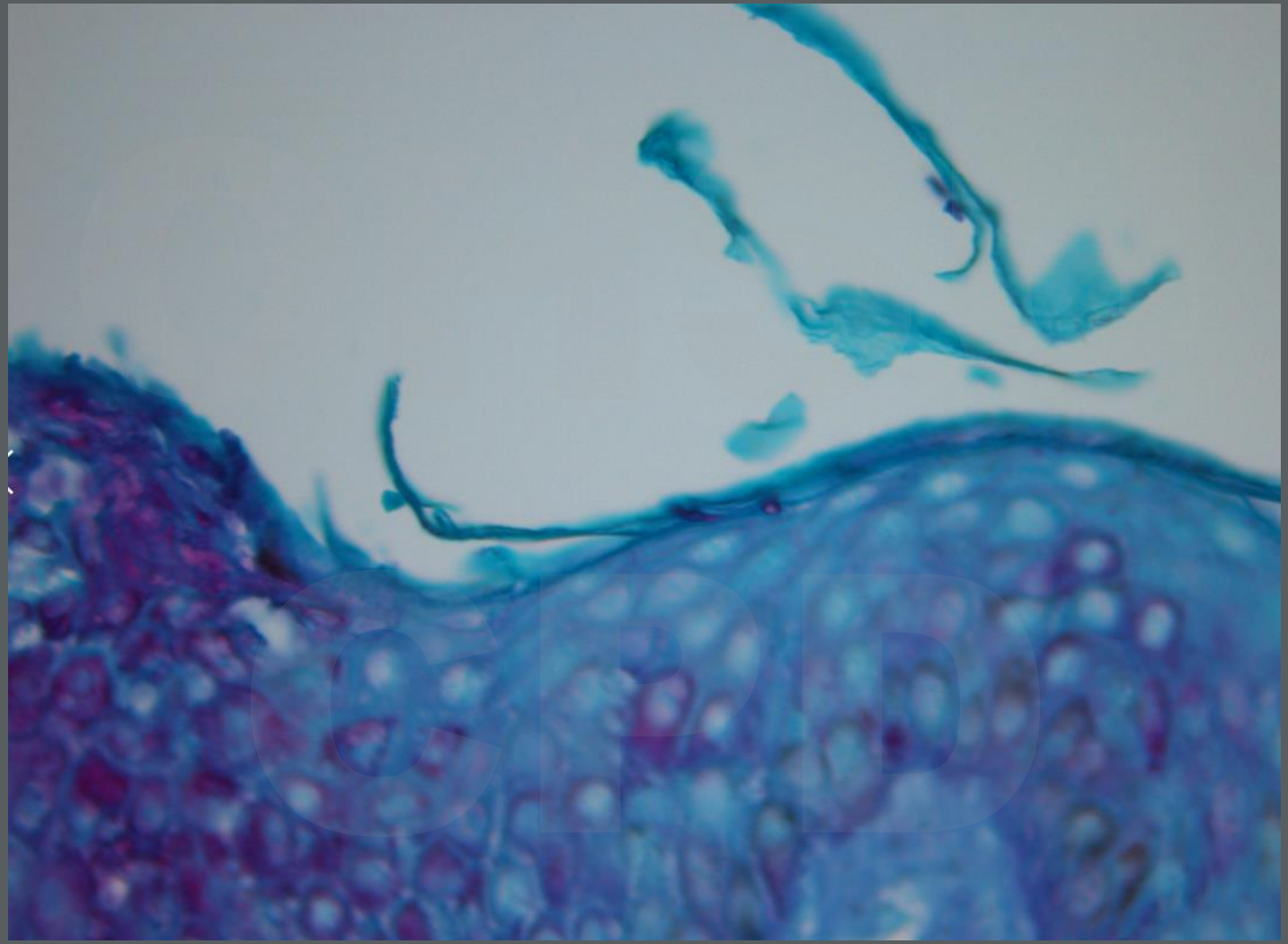
+ h/o Sarcoidosis

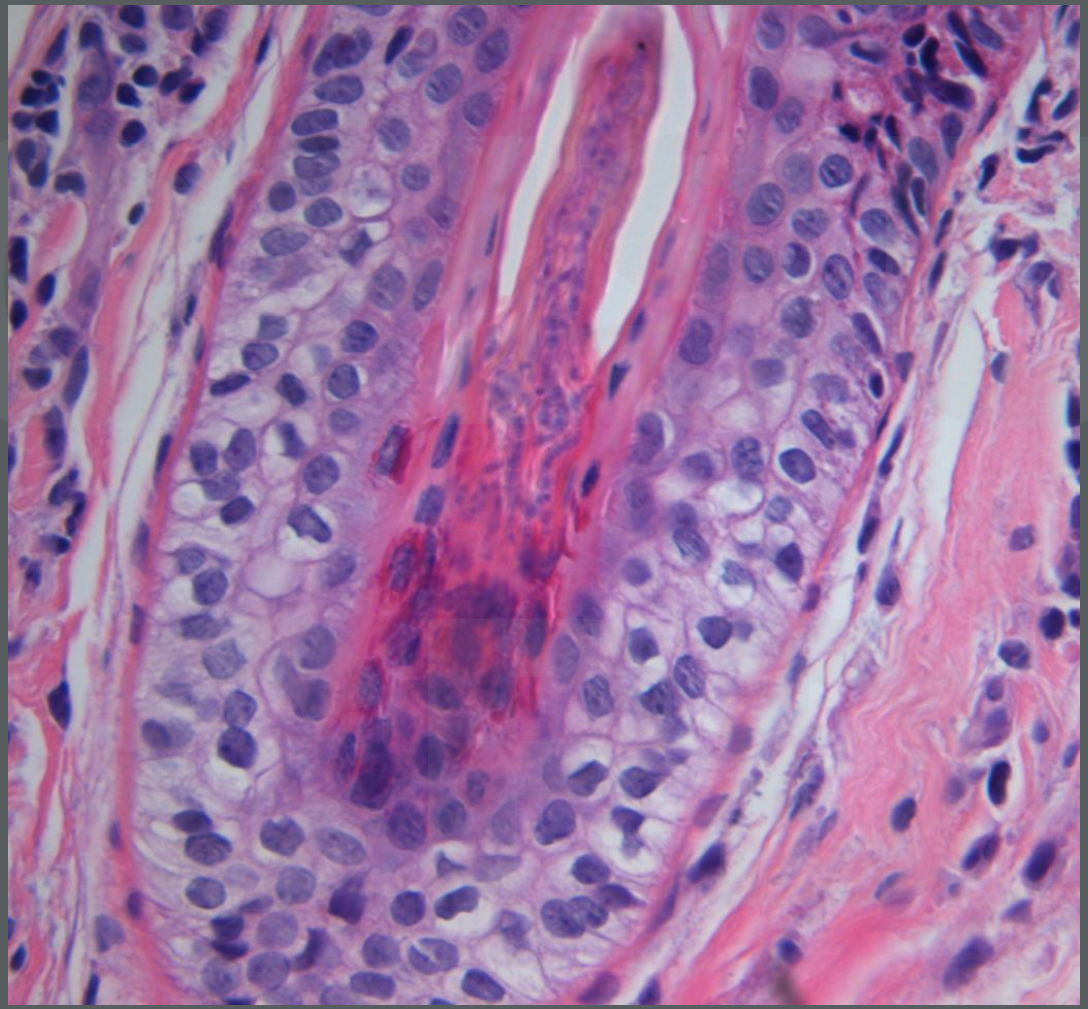
OHSU

Differential Diagnosis

- Non-scaly, dermal
  - Granulomatous
    - Cutaneous sarcoidosis
    - Granuloma annulare







OHSU

Tinea faciei

- Diagnosis - Cognition
- Therapeutic considerations

Cognitive error

- Faults in:
  - Knowledge (gaps, inexperience)
  - Information gathering
  - Processing
  - Verification

Processing error

- Posterior probability
  - Assumption that current symptoms are caused by a known condition
- Premature closure
  - Failure to consider other possibilities
  - Acceptance of an initial diagnosis, often due to previous history, before considering alternative diagnoses and before verification/work-up
- Anchoring bias
  - Focusing on a feature or diagnosis, without considering further information or differentials
- Framing effect
  - How the information is presented, or how the story is told, influences the diagnosis
- Diagnostic momentum
  - Diagnosis which is made and repeated by others becomes more fixed

Cognitive bias in pathology, as exemplified in dermatopathology. Ko CJ, Glusac EJ. Hum Pathol. 2023 Oct;140:267-275. PMID: 36906184

Tinea Faciei with follicular involvement (Majocchi)

- Dermatophytosis
- Topical antifungal (eg, terbinafine 1% cream, allylamine/fungicidal) ineffective in cases with follicular involvement
  - Majocchi ‘granuloma’ requires oral antifungal therapy (terbinafine systemic therapy is off-label use for dermatophyte folliculitis)
- Terbinafine resistance
  - *SQLE* gene (single nucleotide variations in squalene epoxidase gene)
- Itraconazole
  - Drug/drug interactions, cardiovascular events (torsades-de-pointes, ventricular tachycardia)
- DO NOT USE KETOCONAZOLE (hepatoxicity)

- Gupta AK, et al. Trichophyton indotineae: Epidemiology, antifungal resistance and antifungal stewardship strategies. J Eur Acad Dermatol Venereol. 2026 Jan;40(1):29-45. PMID: 40613321.
- Khurana A et al. Clinico-mycological and therapeutic updates on cutaneous dermatophytic infections in the era of Trichophyton indotineae. J Am Acad Dermatol. 2024 Aug;91(2):315-323. PMID: 38574764.

Case 2

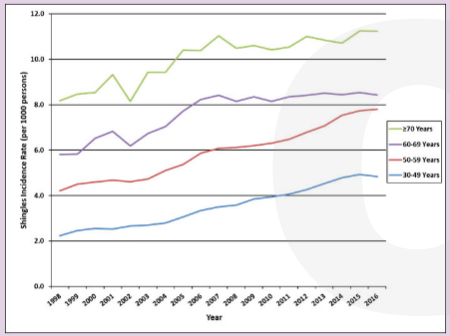
Differential Diagnosis

- Inflammatory, Neoplastic, Infectious
- “sporotrichoid”
- “herpetiform”

Shingles (Zoster)

- Varicella-Zoster virus
  - ~ 1 out of 3 people will develop zoster in their lifetime

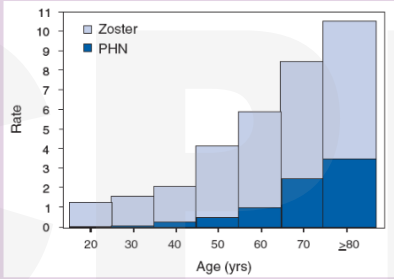
Shingles Rates in Adults 30 and Older, 1998-2016



View Larger

Data Source:
https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/69/2/341/5213085

Shingles and Postherpatic Neuralgia† Rates* by Age, United States



View Larger

*per 1,000 person-years.
† Defined as pain for 30 days or longer

Source:
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5705a1.htm

OHSU

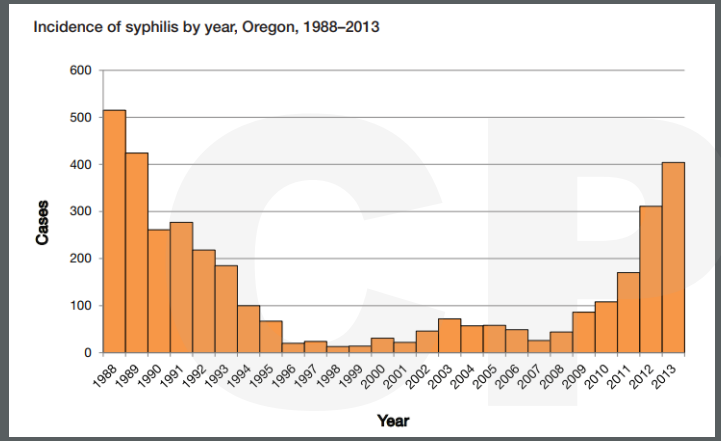
Case 3

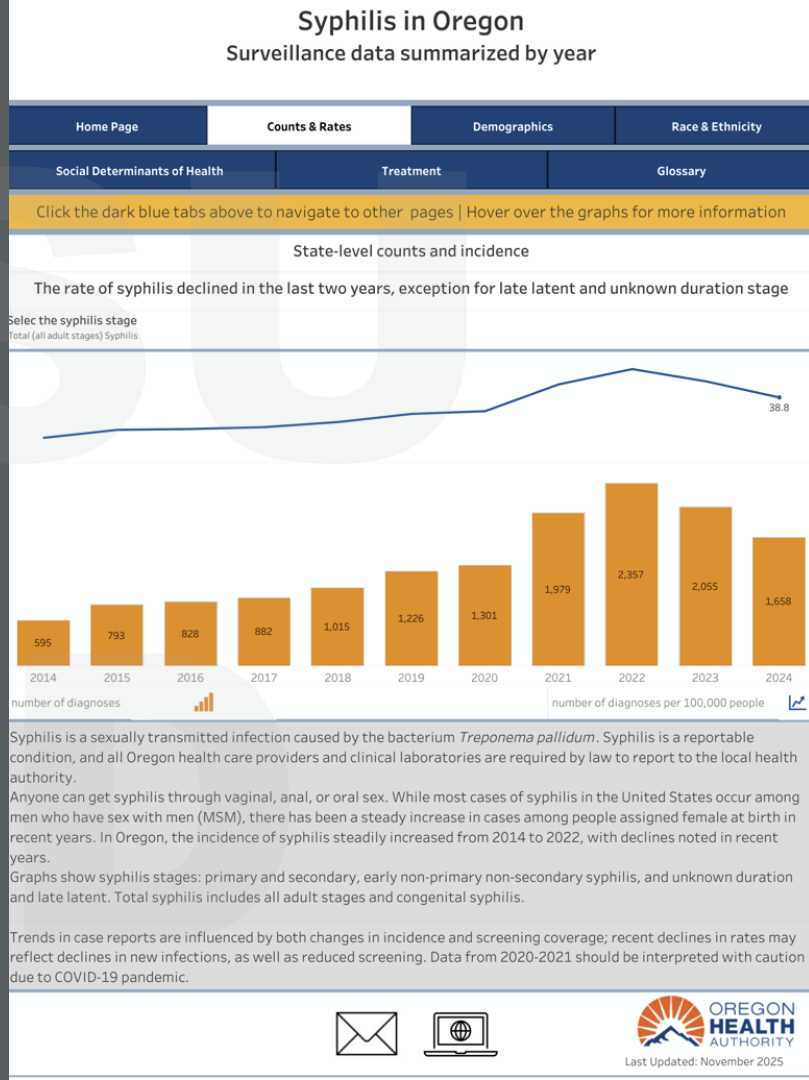
Papulosquamous

- Psoriasiform (psoriasis, psoriasis-like)

Secondary Syphilis

- Treponema pallidum





https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/oregon.health.authority.public.health.divison/viz/STI_17068215959980/700State-LevelCasesandIR

Case 4

OHSU

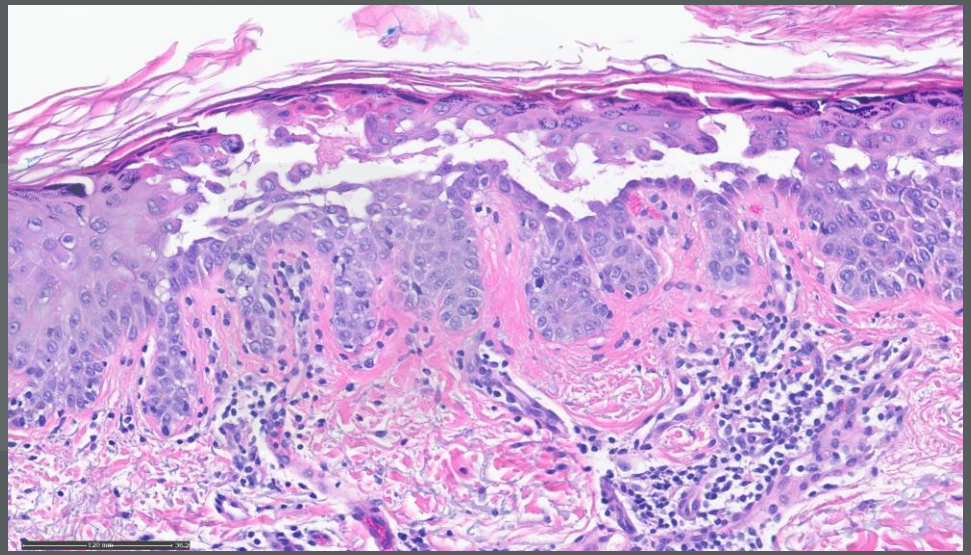

© 2019-2026 VisualDx

Scabies

- *Sarcoptes scabiei var hominis*
- Typical infestation: 10-20 mites
- Post-scabetic pruritus

Grover Disease

- Transient acantholytic dermatosis
- Treatment not required, can be challenging



Case 5

Metastatic Breast Carcinoma

- Cutaneous metastases occur in ~ 5% of internal malignancy; first manifestation or late event
- Breast cancer most common source of metastases to the skin in women

Histologic patterns of cutaneous metastases of breast Carcinoma: A Clinicopathologic Study of 232 Cases. Ronen S, et al. Am J Dermatopathol. 2021 Jun 1;43(6):401-411.
Cutaneous Metastasis. Strickley JD, et al. Heamtol Oncol Clin North Am. 2019 Feb;33(1):173-197.
Cutaneous metastases in patients with metastatic carcinoma: a retrospective study of 4020 patients. Lookingbill DP, et al. J Am Acad Dermatol. 1993 Aug;29(2 Pt 1):228-36.

Case 6

Reactive erythema

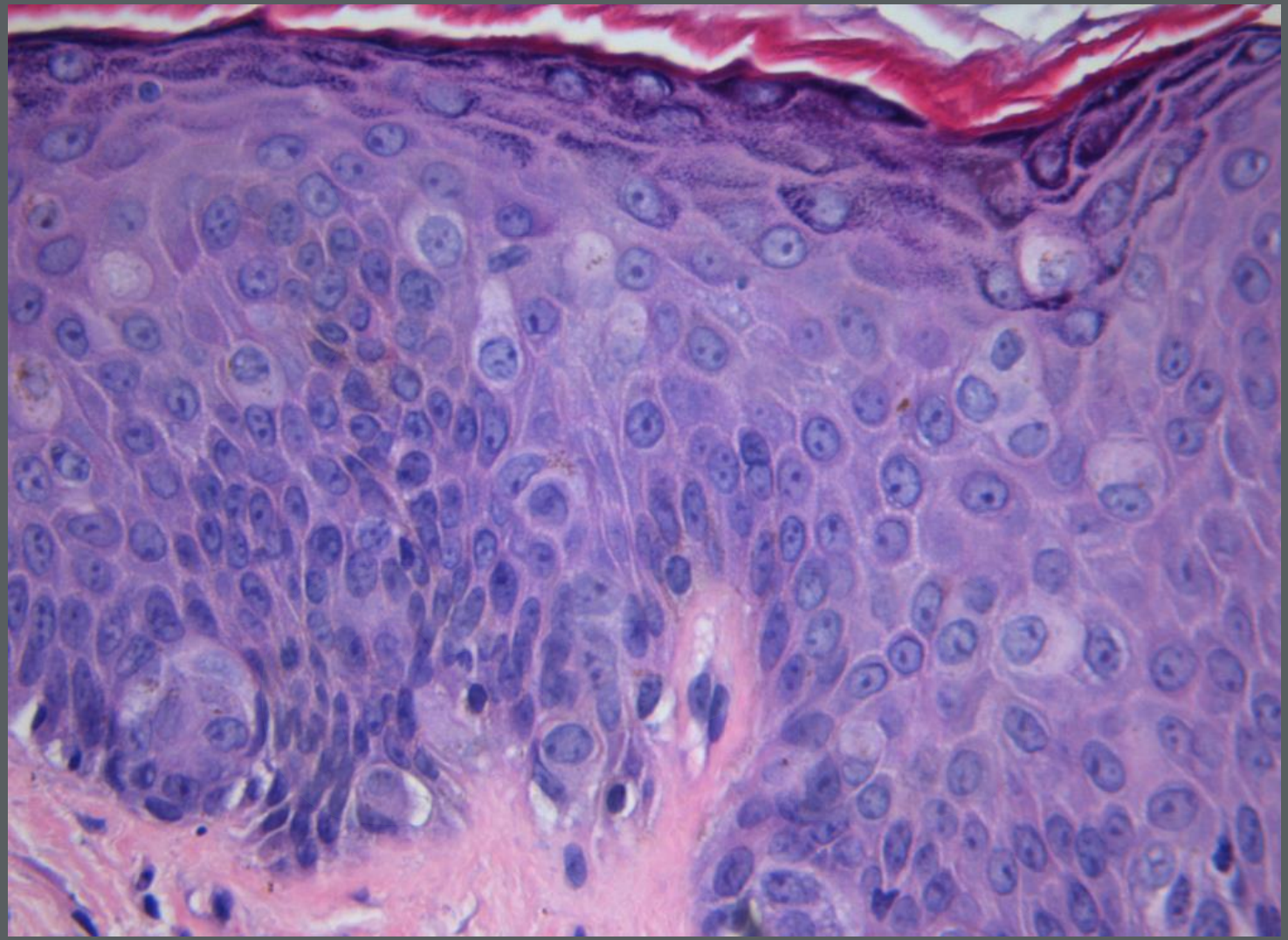
- *Capnocytophaga canimorsus* bacteremia s/p dog bite 3 weeks prior to presentation
- Commensal gram-negative rod oral flora of dogs
  - Blood cultures: slow-growing, identification can be difficult
- Risk factors: alcoholism, splenectomy, immunosuppression, chronic lung disease
- *C. canimorsus* infection
  - Clinical course ranges from self-limited disease to fulminant sepsis with multiorgan failure, disseminated intravascular coagulation, meningitis, and death
  - Mortality 30% even with treatment (cdc.gov)

Urticarial exanthem associated with Capnocytophaga canimorsus bacteremia after a dog bite. Jordan CS., et al. JAAD Case Rep. 2016 Mar;2(2):98-101.

Case 7

Intertrigo

- Common etiologies:
  - Mechanical (irritant contact dermatitis, prurigiform angiomatosis)
  - Inflammatory (inverse psoriasis)
  - Infectious (yeast, dermatophyte)



OHSU

Extramammary Paget Disease

- Primarily 6^{th} – 8^{th} decades
- Apocrine-rich skin, anogenital region
- Relatively rare (underreported?)
- 7-40% of EMPD associated with underlying internal malignancy (in contrast to 90% of mammary Paget disease a/w underlying breast carcinoma)

Extramammary Paget Disease: A Review of the Literature – Part I: History, Epidemiology, Pathogenesis, Presentation, Histopathology, and Diagnostic Work-up. Morris CR, et al. Dermatol Surg. 2020 Feb;46(2):151-158.

Case 8

“I don’t know what it is, but it doesn’t look bad.”

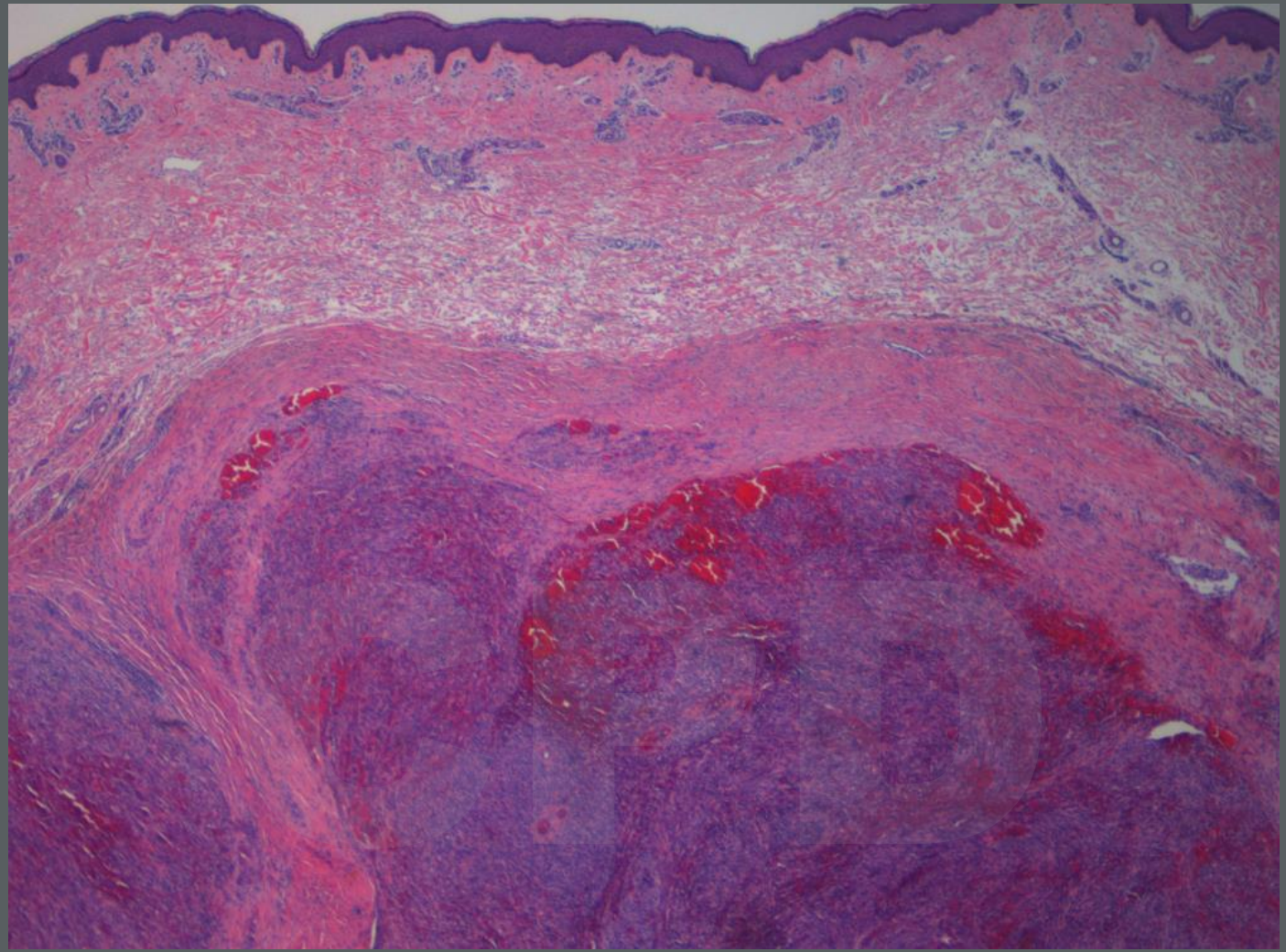
— Resident physician

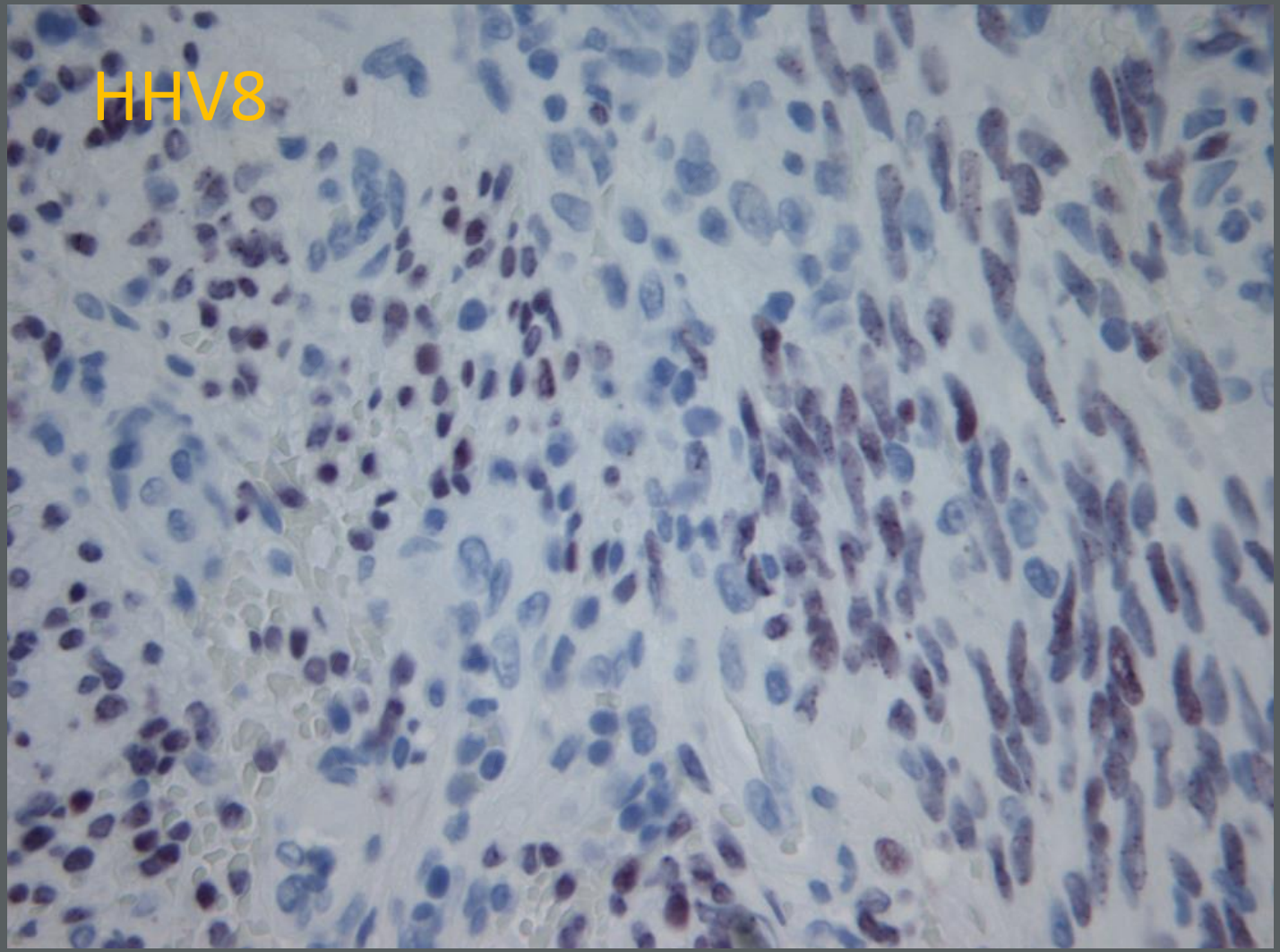
Cognitive bias and medical errors. Elston DM. J Am Acad Dermatol. 2019 Dec;81(6):1249. PMID: 31279022

OHSU

Differential

- Dermatofibroma
- Blue rubber bleb nevus
- Eccrine spiradenoma
- Neurilemmoma/neuroma
- Glomus tumor
- Angiolipoma/Angioleiomyoma
- Leiomyoma





OHSU

Kaposi Sarcoma – classic type

- Human herpesvirus 8 (HHV8)
- Classic (Mediterranean)
  - M > F, 10:1
  - older adult
  - Papules, purple nodules predominating on the lower extremities (legs, ankles, feet)
  - Often indolent, slow evolution

Update on oncogenesis and therapy for Kaposi sarcoma. Dupin N. Curr Opin Oncol. 2020 Mar;32(2):122-128.

Diagnostic conundrum of common skin diseases

- Infection
- Inflammatory
- Neoplastic

"Master dermatologist Bill James was famous for warning graduating residents that they would miss a number of diagnoses in their careers, especially tinea, scabies, and syphilis. He has been proved right many times."

—Dirk Elston

Cognitive bias and medical errors. Elston DM. J Am Acad Dermatol. 2019 Dec;81(6):1249. PMID: 31279022

Thank You