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Podiatry Surgery Sample Case

Foot surgery to remove benign tendon sheath tumor results in chronic pain syndrome.

At age 17 this patient had a painful small lump on the bottom of her left foot. The pain had become worse after she had a foot massage by her boyfriend.

She saw a Podiatrist who recommended treatment by injecting an anti-inflammatory (steroid) medication, but she preferred surgery. He had her sign a very detailed consent form that warned her of many risks including a worsening of her condition, and even death.

Surgery took place in his office under local anesthesia, and he described removing a 1-centimeter (2/5-inch) nodule through a one inch incision on her foot. The Pathologist confirmed the 1-centimeter lump (in pieces) of fibrous flesh (fibroma) of the tendon sheath (covering).

She received crutches and proper office care. The operative site healed without infection. Her pain initially persisted for three weeks, and they urged her to limit weight bearing. By six weeks she was "doing well, minimal swelling. She's still wearing her surgical shoe, it feels more comfortable. The wound is healing nicely. There's some swelling and some mild tenderness, but overall seems to be improving nicely. I'm going to go ahead and dismiss her. She may return to shoes and activity to tolerance. To return if she has any further problems."

By five months after surgery she developed much more pain, and temperature changes in her foot and when she saw a physician specializing in rehabilitation medicine, his impression was: "Possible early left foot reflex sympathetic dystrophy." And he said: "I believe this patient will improve and not require additional intervention."

Reflex sympathetic dystrophy is a bizarre reaction of the "sympathetic nervous system" to any injury or correctly performed operation, which she had. Fortunately she did not need the lumbar sympathetic block (deep needle into the sympathetic nerves next to her aorta and iliac arteries), or an implantable spinal nerve stimulator.

Based on all of the above, she accepted the operation instead of a local injection of steroid medications, had correctly performed surgery that healed, but resulted in her reflex sympathetic dystrophy painful condition.