

BOB MARLEY'S DISEASE: CEREBRAL METASTASIS OF ACRAL MELANOMA

A DOENÇA DE BOB MARLEY: METÁSTASES CEREBRAIS DE MELANOMA ACRAL

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ABSTRACT

Bob Marley's had a great importance to Jamaica, Caribbean popular music, and Pan-Africanism. Under the name of the Wailers, several Marley's success reggae albums were recorded between 1969 and 1975. After this, at the solo career, he was placed as the most important reggae singer. The disease that ruined Bob Marley was an acral melanoma (right hallux) that had a late diagnosis and treatment, followed by metastases to the abdomen, the lungs and the brain. Seizures have been the warning sign that the melanoma had spread, three years after the initial injury. We presented here the history of the disease of this famous singer and reported another patient with a case quite similar to him, calling his illness as "Bob Marley's disease".

Key words: Melanoma, Metastasis, Aphasia

RESUMO

Bob Marley representou um marco para a Jamaica, para a música popular do Caribe, e para o Pan-Africanismo. Com o nome de Wailers, vários álbuns de reggae foram gravados com sucesso entre 1969 e 1975. Em sua carreira solo, ele foi considerado o mais importante cantor de reggae. A doença que dizimou Bob Marley foi um melanoma acral (hálux direito) que teve um diagnóstico e tratamento tardios, seguido de metástases para o abdome, pulmões e encéfalo. Crises convulsivas foram o sinal de alerta, três anos após a lesão inicial, de que o melanoma estava disseminado. Nós apresentamos aqui a história da doença deste famoso cantor e relatamos um outro paciente com um caso similar ao qual denominamos "doença de Bob Marley".

Palavras-chaves: Melanoma, Metástase, Afasia

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Bob Marley's overall importance to Jamaica, Caribbean popular music, and Pan-Africanism is difficult to overstate. Even more than 30 years after his death, Marley's name is known internationally, and he is heralded as a prophet, a peacemaker and peacekeeper, a mystic, and a universal symbol of brotherly/sisterly love.¹

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Robert Nesta Marley, the only child of Cedella Malcom and Captain Norval Sinclair Marley, was born on February 6th, 1945. The birth took place in Nine Mile, Jamaica. In 1959 Bob ended his formal education when he quit school. At age 20, Bob met Rita Anderson, whom he soon married. Together, Bob and Rita had three children, although Bob had many other children outside his relationship with Rita.^{1,2}

Before, in the teenage years, he spent his time playing soccer, hanging out with other ghetto youth, and gradually picking up music. Together with his closest friend Bunny, Bob began to cultivate his musical talents. In 1963 Bob, Bunny and Peter Tosh, under the name The Wailing Wailers, released the single "Simmer Down", which brought them considerable success in Jamaica. Under the name of the Wailers, several success reggae albums were recorded between 1969 and 1975. At the solo career, he appeared on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine in 1976. He was catapulted to the place of most important reggae singer.^{1,2}

RASTAFARISM, RELIGION AND MEDICINE

Parallel with and spurred on in part by the emergence of Jamaican reggae onto the international pop music scene in the mid-1970s, the Jamaican Rastafarian movement was raised. Rastas continually extol the virtues and superiority of African culture and civilization past and present. And for many young Rastafari serves as a potent symbol and expression of defiance, independence, racial pride and solidarity.³

Rastafarianism is a syncretic religion which combines beliefs and practices from many religions. They believe that God ("Jah") is black; that Rastas are the true descendants of the ancient Israelites depicted in the Old Testament; that Western Christianity represents a corruption of a purer and more ancient Judeo-Christian tradition that has been faithfully preserved throughout the millennia by the 1500-year-old Ethiopian Coptic Church. The wearing of "dreadlocks" and brightly col-

ored clothing and ornaments.^{3,4} The Rastafarian use of cannabis became part of their religious rites.⁴ Treatment of diseases with natural herbs is part of this culture.^{2,4}

BOB MARLEY'S CLINICAL CASE

Bob's right hallux was badly injured in a soccer game during a tour in Paris in the summer of 1977. The injury was significant and the doctor noted that Bob had lost most of his toenail and informed him that he needed to stay off of his feet to give the injury time to heal. He was aware of the seriousness of canceling any prearranged tour obligations. Also, Rastafarians do not strictly adhere to modern medicine.^{1,2}

Bob's foot seemed to be worsening instead of healing. The doctor collecting some skin cells for examination. Bob then was informed that the sample revealed mutated cancerous cells that could require the amputation of the affected toe. On July 20, the American tour was postponed to allow Bob to undergo surgery.^{1,2}

On September 19, 1980, while he jogging through the Central Park Bob had a seizure. Bob submitted to a variety of exams. The diagnosis was that Bob had a large brain tumor. In early October, Bob was tested by the experts and he not only had a tumor in his brain, but he also had cancer in his lungs and abdomen. Getting worse after of had a minor stroke, which toll that this took on his body. Seeing this, Bob's doctor began administering chemotherapy.^{1,2}

On March 11, 1981, his vital signs became erratic. At approximately 11:45 on Wednesday, May 11, 1981, the incendiary voice of the international reggae superstar Robert Nesta Marley was silenced for the final time.^{1,2}

The disease that ruined Bob Marley was an acral melanoma (right hallux) that had a late diagnosis and treatment, followed by metastases to the abdomen, the lungs and the brain.^{5,6} Seizures have been the warning sign that the melanoma had spread, three years after the initial injury. This clinical case is called here the Bob Marley's disease.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE BOB MARLEY'S DISEASE.

We followed a 68-year-old man presented with progressive aphasia and gait disorder two weeks before being admitted at the hospital. His neurological examination was evidenced altered state of conscious, sleepiness, right hemiparesis, hyperreflexia and hypertonia.

He had pigmented subungual lesions that had se-

verely damaged the nail bed in the right hallux (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. Acral melanoma with destroyed nail bed. Presence of a pigment in the skin adjacent to the tumor.

Cranial, abdominal and thoracic computed tomography revealed multiple solid nodules suggestive of hematogenous dissemination and melanoma (Figure 2).

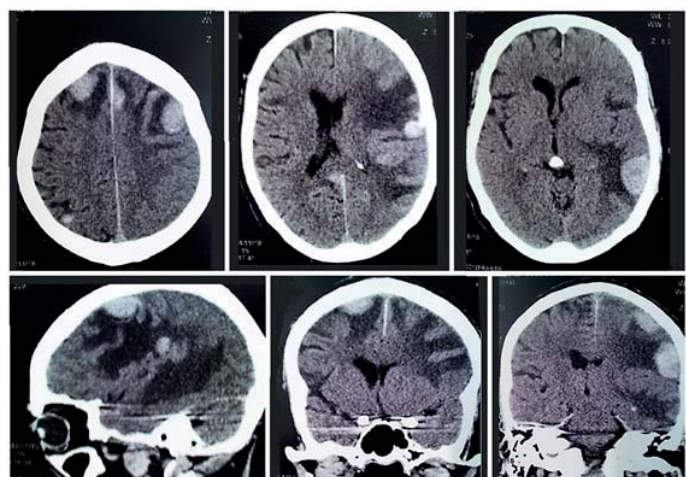


FIGURE 2. Pre-contrast (A, B, C) and post-contrast (D, E, F) computed tomography images showing brain metastases of melanoma. Multiple spontaneously hyperdense solid nodules highlighted by the contrast and associated with marked vasogenic edema suggestive of hematogenous dissemination in both hemispheres. Melanoma metastases are often hyperdense in the pre-contrast phase because of the presence of melanin and hemorrhagic material.

Subungual melanoma originates in the nail matrix and is responsible for 0.7 to 3.5% of all melanoma cases.⁷ Prognosis is poor as the condition is diagnosed late and has an aggressive course.^{5,6} This case is quite similar to that of the reggae singer Bob Marley, who died as a result of brain metastases and intracranial hypertension. This is a case of Bob Marley's disease.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We agree with Teive *et al.*⁸ when they argued that, for example, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis should be recognized as "Charcot's disease" in honor of the professor who studied it instead of "Lou Gering's disease" for the famous player who had this disease. However, in this case, there is no eponym for the neurological manifestations of melanoma metastases. Also, the world press has always reported Bob Marley's features as a neurological cancer, not a melanoma or a systemic cancer. Thus, to clarify the doubts and give a name to this neurological problem, we presented here the history of the disease of this famous singer and reported another patient with a case quite similar to him, calling his illness as "Bob Marley's disease".

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