

Just another of life's burdens (answers on page 42)

Part one

Mrs Patel, at 70 years old, has had inflammatory arthritis for many years in her wrists, knuckles, and ankles, for which she has been taking a combination of anti-inflammatory and analgesic drugs (including piroxicam, amitriptyline, and hydroxychloroquine) for more than 10 years. For 3 months she has noticed worsening vision, with occasional flashing lights. She went first to her optician, who found that her vision had deteriorated since her last visit, with reduced acuity in both eyes of 6/12. Your ophthalmologist colleague reports that she has early cataracts, mild reduction in colour vision on Ishihara plate tests, and annular scotomas in both eyes. He reported a 'bull's eye' appearance around the macula in both retinas. Mrs Patel has never smoked, and is of normal weight for her height. Her blood pressure and heart rate and rhythm are normal, and apart from morning joint stiffness and pain, she has no other symptoms or signs of note.

Q1 Given these findings, what is the most likely diagnosis?

- (a) 'Dry' macular degeneration.
- (b) 'Wet' macular degeneration.
- (c) Glaucoma.
- (d) Retinal detachments.
- (e) Toxic macular degeneration.

Part two

Q2 Which of the following are the usual risk factors for this eye problem?

- High anti-inflammatory drug dose.
- (a) Long duration of anti-inflammatory treatment.
- (b) Drug-drug interaction.
- (c) Renal disease.
- (d) Liver disease.
- (e) Smoking.
- (f) Diabetes.

Part three

Q3 Which of the following visual symptoms did Mrs Patel admit to when asked further questions?

- (a) Making mistakes when going to the next line when reading.
- (b) Difficulty recognising faces.
- (c) Distortion in her central vision.
- (d) Haloes around lights at night.
- (e) Pain in the eyeballs with headaches.

Part four

Q4 Once the diagnosis was made, what first step was taken to help Mrs Patel's deteriorating vision?

- (a) Piroxicam was stopped.
- (b) Amitriptyline was stopped.
- (c) Hydroxychloroquine was stopped.
- (e) None of the above.
- (f) Prescription of ocular pressure-lowering drops.
- (g) Referral for cataract surgery.

Part five

Q5 Once treatment has started what is the likely outcome?

- (a) The visual acuity should improve dramatically.
- (b) She is likely eventually to go blind, but the rate of deterioration can be slowed.
- (c) Her visual deterioration should stop and her eyesight should remain at her present level.