

Jonas Lelis and the syndrome that bears his name

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ABSTRACT

Jonas Lelis (1914 – 2011) was a professor and one of the Lithuanian pioneers in dermatology. In the 1970s, Lelis described four unrelated patients of eastern European origin with an association of ectodermal dysplasia and acanthosis nigricans, a rare congenital genodermatosis that was to be known as Lelis syndrome. The syndrome is characterized by hypotrichosis, hypohidrosis, and acanthosis nigricans. This report sheds light on Jonas Lelis and the syndrome that bears his name.

Key words: Acanthosis nigricans; Ectodermal dysplasia; Lelis syndrome

Jonas Lelis (Fig. 1) was a world-renown Lithuanian professor of dermatology and venerology and a pioneer in dermatology [1-3]. Among his great contributions to dermatology, he is credited for describing a syndrome that was to be known as Lelis syndrome (LS) [4-10].

Lelis syndrome (MIM ID %608290), also known as Ectodermal dysplasia and hypohidrosis with acanthosis nigricans [10], is a rare autosomal recessive condition with only several cases reported worldwide [9].

It is characterized by hypotrichosis, hypohidrosis, and acanthosis nigricans. Additional features reported include perioral radial furrowing, hypodontia, palmoplantar hyperkeratosis, a furrowed tongue, nail dystrophy, disturbances in skin pigmentation [4] (perioral and periorbital hyperpigmentation, vitiligo, and perinevic leukoderma), and mental retardation [10].

Some authors have suggested that LS occurs secondary to mutations in the EDA gene [2].

The syndrome has, so far, been reported in Europe [4,7,9], Saudi Arabia [6], and Brazil [4,8]. Van Steensel et al. suggested that Lelis syndrome may be

a manifestation of X-linked hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia [9].

Some authors reported successful treatment with acitretin of skin lesions seen in LS.⁸

Jonas Lelis was born on July 5, 1914 [1,3], in Skaistgirys, Pušalotas District, Lithuania. In 1933, he finished Panevėžys Secondary School for Boys. Between 1933 and 1939, he attended the Medical Institute at Kaunas University, named after Vytautas Magnus. After graduating from Kaunas University in 1938, J. Lelis practiced medicine in Šakiai, Panevėžys, Akmenė and Ylakai. In the years 1946-1957, he worked at the Vilnius Institute of Dermatological and Venereal Diseases, since 1948 as a director; and he also was the chief medical inspector in the Ministry. From 1948 through 1993, he continued his scientific career. He held the position of a lecturer at the Medical Faculty of Vilnius University and received the title of associate professor and professor [3]. He had written more than 300 scientific articles in both Lithuanian and foreign journals and 10 monographs on dermatology and venereology [1]. He had developed interest in numerous dermatological diseases, but genetic skin diseases were one of his favorites.

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Figure 1: Jonas Lelis (1914–2011).

In three of his publications, he described an autosomal recessive disease, ectodermal dysplasia (Lelis syndrome), in seven patients of eastern European origin. He had also published fiction books and biographical essays [1]. In 1965, he became a republican prize winner for his monograph “Red gum” [3]. His other monographs are widely known as well, to name a few, “F. Schaudinn: The discoverer of the pale monster” (on Fritz R. Schaudinn as a scientist of Lithuanian roots) (1971), “Inherited dermatoses and syndromes” (1981), “The atlas of dermatological and venereal diseases” (by Lelis and a co-author, 1998), and “Tragical and comical miniatures” (1998) [3]. Lelis was a member of the medical corporation *Fraternitas Lituanica*. He is widely known for a high degree of intelligence and erudition. He did sports, played chess, and was a polyglot with a good command of about ten foreign languages. He had shared his knowledge lavishly with his students and doctors alike [3]. Lelis died at the age of 97 on December 31, 2011.

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