FUNGAL INFECTIONS OF THE SKIN

Commonly in summer, fungal infections become ubiquitous due to the heat, humidity and friction. The 2 commonest types of fungal infections seen in summer are ringworm and candidiasis. Ringworm is so called because it is seen as a centrally clearing, spreading scaly ring in different parts of the body, but most commonly in the groin folds, often making the sufferer the center of attention at a party for all the wrong reasons, given the proclivity to frenziedly attack ones’ mid third from time to time, to relieve the itch. The fungi that cause ringworm belong to 1 of 3 genera namely trichophyton, epidermophyton or microsporum. The fungi are acquired from others who have the infection directly through shared clothing, footwear, towels, dresses or bed sheets. They can also be acquired from pet or farm animals and from the soil by agriculturists, garden, trekking and camping enthusiasts. Ringworm infection on the palms and soles can be mistaken for eczema or other skin diseases, and appear on the scalp as a localized itchy dandruff or hair loss. Hair oil left on the scalp or skin encourages fungal growth. Candidiasis results from overgrowth of Candida species of organisms normally present on the skin due to the permissive effect of heat, moisture, occlusion and friction in the body folds. The spore form of the organism buds into filaments and these filaments feed on the superficial skin cells causing the water between cells from the lower layers to ooze out and cause a moist raw pink area in the body folds. Candidiasis is one cause of diaper rash in infants. In adults it is seen as soreness in the groin folds, toe webs, armpits or below breasts. Diabetes, antibiotics, birth control pills nylon and silk undergarments, tight inner wear, obesity, excessive sweating and sedentary habits encourage candidiasis. Loose inner wear made of soft absorbent material, preferably cotton, proper drying of skin after bath, powdering body folds before dressing and changing into loose garments at home help.

Our data show that 12.8% of our out patients come with fungal infections. Many skin diseases mimic fungal infections and vice versa. A Dermatologist would be able to diagnose the type of fungal infection one has and prescribe the appropriate antifungal. There are many highly effective antifungal available today for local application and oral uses, specific to the type of fungal infection one has. The specific type of fungal infection can be diagnosed with a potassium hydroxide, cyanoacrylate mount or fungal culture.