Sessione XIV – Proposta di percorso per la diagnosi microbiologica di tubercolosi e micobatteriosi non tubercolare

INFECTIONS CAUSED BY NONTUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIA.

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Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) is the term indicating those Mycobacterium species that are different from Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex (MTC) and Mycobacterium leprae whose detection in clinical samples is almost invariably associated with disease. The most important features distinguishing NTM from MTC include a lower pathogenicity and the lack of human-to-human transmission.

NTM are widely distributed in both natural and man-made environments; organisms can be found in soil and water with high isolation rates. Human disease is suspected to be acquired from environmental exposure and pulmonary infection is likely to depend on the aerosol route. The most common clinical manifestation of NTM infection is pulmonary disease, but lymphatic, skin/soft tissue, osteoarticular and disseminated disease are also important.

The past two decades have shown a remarkable expansion of new NTM species, primarily because of the availability of new, more sensitive molecular methods for NTM identification, but also because of a considerable increase in the frequency of isolation due to growing at-risk populations, improved awareness and diagnostic facilities. There are currently more than 180 NTM species, at least 40 of which are associated with lung infection.

With the increased frequency of isolation and the profusion of new species, clinicians are increasingly being faced with the clinical scenario of deciding what to do when an NTM species grows from a patient's respiratory specimen. In this context, diagnostic criteria remain imperfect and treatment should be individualized according to patient and species.