

## COMPELLING COMMENTS

### Hypertrichosis: The Werewolf Syndrome without a Wolf Pack

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Hypertrichosis is defined as excess hair growth on the body that typically spares the palms and soles.<sup>1</sup> While less than 50 cases are reported in the literature, it is important to recognize the magnitude of impact this disorder creates.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes colloquially known as “Werewolf Syndrome,” patients with hypertrichosis have been recorded since the Middle Age and the Renaissance.<sup>2</sup> Historically, these patients were often exhibited in circuses for their peculiarity.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the stigma against excess hair continues into the modern age.<sup>3</sup> Patients with hypertrichosis not only face social isolation and bullying but face numerous difficulties finding a job as well as finding a spouse.<sup>3</sup> Women face a higher burden, as it is less socially acceptable for women to have excess hair.<sup>3</sup> Patients with hypertrichosis continue to work in circuses, often before they can even walk.<sup>3</sup> Many women with hypertrichosis are single mothers due to partner abandonment.<sup>3</sup> With no support, they have no choice but to be exhibited as a sideshow attraction and subject their child to the same fate.<sup>3</sup>

While there is no permanent cure for hypertrichosis<sup>2</sup>, the lack of an advocacy group, patient support network, or formal organization presents even greater hardships to patients with this disease.<sup>3</sup> In a disorder characterized by an extremely high social

stigma, a social network with others facing the same difficulties may make a world of difference.

As one patient with hypertrichosis commented about wolves living in a zoo: “Both of our faces are covered in hair, and we both live trapped - them in the zoo and me in this body,” he says. “At least the wolves treat me the same as they treat other humans.”<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1.** Historical depiction of hypertrichosis.

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