

## COMPELLING COMMENTS

### Was it Auspitz's Sign?

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The Auspitz sign describes the phenomenon of pinpoint bleeding following the scraping of psoriatic plaques' silvery scale – a classic finding in psoriasis. This finding is due to both a thinning of the epidermis and exposure of the underlying dilated post-capillary venules located within the dermal papillae. Although first described in psoriasis, this clinical feature can be demonstrated in other skin conditions like Darier's disease and actinic keratosis.<sup>1</sup>

Today, most associate this psoriatic pinpoint bleeding with Carl Heinrich Auspitz, an Austrian dermatologist. However, contrary to what the eponym suggests, Auspitz was not the first to describe the phenomenon.<sup>2,3</sup> The earliest known description of this finding was written by Daniel Turner, a disfranchised surgeon who, in 1736, wrote, "in [a patient],...whose Knee a large [Lichen] Eruption, was seated, accompanied with great itching: Whence, upon rubbing, a Scale should throw off...I raised one of these...with the Edge of my Spathula, several small Specks of Blood appeared underneath..."<sup>2</sup> Again in 1808 while commenting on psoriasis, English dermatologist Robert Willan, wrote, "...should any portion of the diseased surface be forcibly excoriated, there issues out a thin lymph, mixed with some drops of blood".<sup>2</sup> 30 years later, Auspitz's

mentor, Ferdinand Ritter von Hebra, was credited for first observing this clinical sign in one of Moritz Kaposi's textbooks, without mention of Auspitz.<sup>2</sup> How then did the name of Carl Heinrich Auspitz become tacked to this quickly recognizable finding?

The Auspitz sign is known as it is today not because of his discovery, but rather his impactful treatise on pathology and therapeutics of the skin.<sup>3</sup> It is in this treatise he describes the phenomenon that has been attributed to his name.<sup>3</sup> It was translated into English in 1885 and became one of the early foundational pieces of modern European dermatopathology.

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