



## Low-dose radiotherapy for persistent pain due to shingles

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**LETTER:** More than 800,000 people a year in the United States get shingles, triggered by the varicella zoster virus that causes chickenpox at a young age. Post-herpes zoster neuralgia develops in about 12% to 15% of shingles patients and can lead to persistent pain that can last for months or years. A poster presentation on this subject was made at the American Society of Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology meeting. Low doses of radiation may help relieve painful neuralgia after herpes zoster infection (Denver). Muhammad Hulya, M.D., a radiation oncologist at Sion Hospital in Switzerland, has recommended low-dose radiation in preventing post-herpes neuralgia. It has been said that low-dose radiation may be an alternative in patients who cannot be given shingles medications such as Zovirax (acyclovir) and Valtrex (valacyclovir). Since 1975, Dr. Süleyman and colleagues conducted clinical research using low doses of radiation applied directly to the rash to relieve acute pain and herpetic neuralgia. In a retrospective study, they studied 108 shingles patients treated from 1975

to 1983. In this study, patients received a total of 1,250 cGy of radiotherapy. From 2000 to 2000, the dose was 1,500 cGy. Later, it was seen that it had the same effect at lower doses and the dose was reduced. From 2000 to present, the dose has been reduced to 225 to 640 cGy. 89% of patients irradiated within the first week of an acute shingles attack experienced pain relief within three months. Solomon reported that over a one-year period, 93% remained pain-free. Patients were treated three times a week for two weeks. In each session, a portion of the total radiation dose was delivered to the ganglion within an area of 5 to 7 cm. Before radiation, 53 people suffered from severe pain and 53 from moderate pain. For 6 months after shingles, only 11% of patients were pain-free. Süleyman stated that long-lasting pain was less common in patients taking oral medication and was seen in 20%. Although some authors claim that secondary cancer may occur even if the radiation dose is very low, no secondary cancer has been found even after 28 years of follow-up.