MAJOR REVIEW

Retinal Pigment Epithelial Detachment
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Abstract. Detachment of the retinal pigment epithelium is a prominent feature of many chorio-retinal disease processes, the most prevalent of which is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Detachment of the retinal pigment epithelium may or may not be associated with choroidal neovascularization and may be caused by different types of pathogenesis, each associated with distinct angiographic features, natural course, visual prognosis, and response to treatment. The phrase “detachment of the retinal pigment epithelium” is used quite often, not always in the correct association and with no clear differentiation between its various types. It is important to identify the specific nature of detachment of the retinal pigment epithelium, and to establish an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan. Therefore, we present a review of the existing types of detachment of the retinal pigment epithelium with what we propose as being appropriate nomenclature and classification, and potential treatment recommendations. (Surv Ophthalmol 52:227–243, 2007. © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

Key words. age-related macular degeneration • choroidal neovascularization • occult CNV • retinal pigment epithelial detachment

I. Introduction

Retinal pigment epithelium detachment (PED) is a prominent feature of many chorio-retinal disease processes, the most prevalent of which is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Accurate interpretation of the clinical and angiographic findings in PEDs could be difficult, perhaps even to experienced retina specialists. The development of choroidal neovascularization (CNV) has been associated with long-standing PED, and as it poses an increased risk of severe visual loss, recognition of its presence and extent is a major concern. Because there are, as yet, no established recommendations for the treatment of PED, whether or not associated with CNV, the positive finding of PED may affect treatment management and thus may have long-term prognostic significance.

Several forms of PED have been reported. This review characterizes the pathogenesis, clinical features, angiographic appearance, natural course, and prognosis of various types of PED in AMD.

II. Pathogenesis

The retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) monolayer, extending from the optic disk margin continuously into the ciliary body epithelium, is bounded on its apical surface by the apical surface of the retina and on its basal surface by the collagenous layer of Bruch’s membrane (Fig. 1). Proper anatomical apposition between the retina, the RPE, and Bruch’s membrane is crucial for nutritional support of the photoreceptors, retinol metabolism, phagocytosis of the photoreceptors outer segments, and
formation of the outer blood-retinal barrier, and thus for good visual function.\textsuperscript{2,105,115} Microvilli present at the inner surface of RPE cells create interdigitations with the outer segments of the photoreceptors of the retina, enhancing their apposition. Inter-photoreceptor matrix further stabilizes the adhesion between the retina and the RPE.\textsuperscript{105}

The forces maintaining normal adhesion between the RPE and Bruch’s membrane are less well understood. Under normal conditions, there is a net bulk flow of fluid from the vitreous toward the choroid, with its generation depending on hydrostatic and osmotic forces within the two bodies. Both the RPE and the retina offer resistance to the fluid flow, but as the former has greater resistance due to its limited hydraulic conductivity, a vector force is generated pushing it against Bruch’s membrane.\textsuperscript{69} The attachment of the RPE basement membrane to Bruch’s membrane is possibly complemented through regions of hemidesmosomes containing fine filaments of laminin, proteoglycans and collagen types IV and V.\textsuperscript{79}

Detachment of the RPE occurs between the basal lamina of the RPE cell and the inner collagenous Bruch’s membrane.\textsuperscript{86,121} The etiology of PED can be divided into four major categories: inflammatory, ischemic, idiopathic, and degenerative. Inflammatory PED occurs when choroidal inflammation causes increased vascular permeability and breakdown of the outer blood ocular barrier,\textsuperscript{50} with subsequent accumulation of fluid rich in protein under the RPE, as in Vogt-Koyanagi-Harada syndrome. In several pathologic states, such as malignant hypertension and eclampsia, ischemia of the retinal and choroidal vessel walls resulting from endovascular damage was suggested as a possible cause of breakdown of the blood ocular barrier leading to leakage and accumulation of fluid under both layers,\textsuperscript{117} and formation of ischemic PED. The prototype of idiopathic PED is probably central serous chorio-retinopathy, in which choroidal dysfunction resulting in multifocal hyperpermeability,\textsuperscript{27,116} combined with a defect in the RPE barrier allows abnormal leakage of fluid and protein into the sub-RPE and subretinal space.\textsuperscript{27,117}

This review focuses on degenerative PED, which is the type associated with AMD.

A. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DEGENERATIVE PED

Although PED can occur under diverse conditions in association with AMD, the precise differences between the pathogenic aspects of the various clinical entities, which will be specified subsequently, are not completely understood. The pathogenesis of PED in AMD is probably a continuum with that of degenerative changes occurring with age in Bruch’s membrane, and formation of CNV. Generally, hydrophobic barrier formation in Bruch’s membrane, as a result of several ultrastructural changes occurring with age, is commonly believed to be of paramount pathogenic significance.\textsuperscript{11,12,36,53,65} Green et al have shown a direct relationship between aging and thickness of Bruch’s membrane,\textsuperscript{54} established both by light and electron microscopy. The generalized thickening was shown to be secondary to accumulation of waste products and deposition of lipids, as well as an increase in collagen content.\textsuperscript{10,75,98} Pauleikhoff et al performed a histochemical and morphologic study of aging changes in Bruch’s membrane.\textsuperscript{91} A progressive accumulation of neutral lipids, possibly derived from degradation products of photoreceptor outer segments with relation to age, was associated with destruction of the native architecture of the tissue and implicated as a cause of photoreceptor dysfunction and PED occurring in AMD. Other works have also shown increased lipid content of Bruch’s membrane, resulting from transport of partially digested phagocytized material from the RPE cells\textsuperscript{64,117} to be associated with reduced hydraulic conductivity after 50 years of age.\textsuperscript{64,84,117} These mechanisms occur more notably in the posterior pole.

Development of drusen, representing histologically localized accumulations of basal linear deposits,\textsuperscript{52,101} is considered another manifestation of the diffuse pathology and formation of layer of debris just described. Drusen are seen clinically at the posterior pole of patients in their 7th decade, as pale yellow-white, typically 63–175 μm, and are among the recognized ocular risk factors for development of CNV in patients with advanced AMD. Occasionally, the increased hydrophobicity and reduced hydraulic conductivity to fluid outflow from the vitreous toward the choroid prompts accumulation of fluid beneath the RPE, in spite of
continued pumping of the RPE,12,107 and probably relate to pathogenesis of serous PED.

Another feature of AMD is PED associated with CNV, the precise pathogenesis of which is a matter of ongoing controversy. One theory, proposed by Gass in 1984, relates to ingrowth of new leaking vessels into Bruch’s membrane and the sub-RPE space,40 sometimes undetectably clinically, giving rise to elevated hydrostatic pressure within it and causing subsequent serous or hemorrhagic detachment of the overlying RPE (Figs. 2 and 3). Several studies have provided evidence that local inflammatory mechanisms may add further damage to the RPE and Bruch’s membrane and lead to the breakdown of their normal anatomic apposition.5,59,76,88,89 Inflammatory involvement has been demonstrated in studies of excised CNV tissue of AMD patients,30,66,68,106 and ingrowth of CNV into the sub-RPE space was suggested to be augmented by activated macrophages and other inflammatory cells that secret enzymes and cytokines that degrade Bruch’s membrane.

Another theory, proposed by Green et al,54 relates to invasion of CNV through an already thickened Bruch’s membrane and preexisting PED, suggesting that CNV may develop as a complication of PED, representing a continuum of a common underlying disease process. Marshall et al have proposed that PED may cause disruption of function of collagen type IV found normally in Bruch’s membrane.79 Thus, migration of endothelial cells into the collagenous zones of Bruch’s membrane is allowed and the normal prevention of ingrowth of CNV is lost.

A significant contribution to our current concept of the pathogenesis of neovascularization and formation of vascularized PED was made in the past few years, when the importance of anastomotic connections between the retina and the choroidal circulation was introduced. Hartnett et al identified PED associated with retinal angiomatous lesions among other PED types diagnosed in patients with AMD,60 and have suggested that the retinal vascular abnormality may give rise to retino-choroidal anastomoses (RCA). Although the pathogenesis of these lesions is not fully understood, the authors suggested loss of RPE polarity as a possible pathogenic factor, by allowing retinal neovascular complexes to invade the RPE and become similar to choroidal vasculature. In a subsequent report by Kuhn et al, RCA were indicated as a frequent (93%) finding in patients with serous PED and occult CNV demonstrating hot spots on ICG, and the importance of RCA in evaluation of these patients was stressed.72 In a study of the incidence of RCA in patients with occult CNV and their affect on response to laser treatment,112 the nature of RCA was suggested to be probably retinal angiomatous proliferations, and these lesions were concluded as a possible primary event in formation of separation of the RPE and secondary ingrowth of CNV, although they may also be observed in eyes without associated PED. The previously mentioned studies probably strengthen the theory that development of neovascularization is a key event in the pathogenesis of detachment of the RPE.

B. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DRUSENOID PED

Drusenoid PED is another form of PED related to AMD. Drusen, deposits of neutral lipid within the extracellular material of Bruch’s membrane, external to the basement membrane of the RPE have been shown to occur with age.12,76,91,101,107 Histologically, Gass described deposits of extracellular material lying between the RPE basement membrane and the inner collagenous Bruch’s membrane.43 Typically, these deposits, termed basal linear drusen, occur in middle-aged patients and are considered to represent the earliest sign of AMD. A distinction should be made between basal linear deposits and basal laminar deposits, which are nodular thickenings of the RPE basement membrane.101
and probably have a different pathogenesis. Basal laminar deposits appear clinically as small, round drusen evenly distributed in the posterior pole, have equal frequency in whites and non-whites, and predispose to formation of vitelliform macular detachment later in the 6th decade of life. The present discussion refers to drusen associated with AMD, namely basal linear deposits.

Clinically, basal linear drusen are visible as yellow-white deposits lying deep to the retina in variable size and shape, are considered dynamic, exhibiting a natural process of increase and decrease in size, and may coalesce or regress. Confluence of soft drusen, larger than 63 μm, usually occurring in the central macula, probably predispose to formation of drusenoid PED, whereas those with indistinct borders were found to have the highest rate of progression to confluence and advanced AMD. The term drusenoid PED usually refers to lesions larger than 1,000 μm in greatest length, although the typical size is less than one disk diameter. It has been hypothesized that accumulation of fluid due to the hydrophobic barrier created by the lipid deposition in Bruch’s membrane may contribute to further enlargement of the detachment (Fig. 4).

III. Clinical and Angiographic Features

The different clinical entities of PED types associated with AMD are distinct in many clinical and prognostic aspects, as will be discussed later, but they all share several basic similarities. In most instances, PED occurs asymptomatically, but patients will report blurred vision, distortion, metamorphopsia, or micropia when the fovea is involved. Induced hyperopia is another possible symptom. PED is detected on clinical examination as a single or multiple elevated mounds. Its size may vary from sub-biomicroscopic to several disk diameters or larger. Pigmentary changes, such as clumping or mottling, are common overlying PED. Orange pigment ring and pigment band on the dome, proposed by Yannuzzi as a possible indicator of a chronic disease, were reported to be composed of melanin and lipofuscin. Lipofuscin, belonging to a group of autofluorescent lipid–protein aggregates accumulating in post-mitotic RPE cells, have been shown to parallel in amount and distribution to intensity of fundus autofluorescence. As lipofuscin may induce apoptosis of the RPE cells, the resultant fundus autofluorescence was suggested by Spaide to be regarded as a possible sign of future oxidative injury.

Frequently, though not invariably, PED is a feature of an underlying CNV. One clue to the presence of CNV beneath a PED could be an overlying serous retinal detachment arising as a result of disruption of the tight junctions between adjacent RPE cells. A shallow serous retinal detachment may overlie PED, however, even in the absence of CNV, although quite rarely. Other possible findings indicating the presence of CNV underlying a PED include the presence of lipid and blood. Chorio-retinal folds radiating from a serous PED were found to be another manifestation of CNV, because contraction of sub-RPE fibrovascular tissue causes folding of the overlying and intimately adherent RPE. In light of their similar ophthalmoscopic appearance, the importance of fluorescein angiography (FA) in more exacting evaluation of seemingly identical PED types and correct recognition of a co-existing CNV has long been recognized. The main clinical differences between distinct PED types, the accepted FA guidelines that had been drawn for their detection, as well as ICG angiography characteristics, are now described.

A. SEROUS PED

Serous PED is defined as an area of smooth, sharply demarcated dome-shaped and regular RPE elevation, often yellow-orange in color with reddish halo of subretinal fluid. It characteristically has sharply delineated margins, caused by the firm adherence of RPE to Bruch’s membrane. The diagnosis of serous PED is made on FA, which reveals a rapid, bright, and uniform filling of the entire lesion, slightly later than background fluorescence, accumulating progressively and reaching a peak in very late frames without leakage (Fig. 5). The intense hyperfluorescence that remains bright with sharply delineated borders in the late-phase frames is thought to be due to rapid diffusion of the fluorescein molecules across a permeable Bruch’s membrane and pooling in the sub-RPE space.
Serous PED is described as potentially obscuring the boundaries and thereby the extent of associated CNV, which is hence called occult in FA. Gass described a meniscus of blood or pigment at the dependent part of the PED, as well as a notched or reniform figure, representing firm adherence between the CNV and overlying RPE, resulting in detachment of the RPE at the margin of the CNV, as providing clues to the presence of an associated underlying CNV.

Digital indocyanine green videoangiography (ICGV) has been reported to provide enhanced definition of the choroidal vasculature and Bruch’s membrane, thus enabling better study of...

Fig. 5. A: Fluorescein angiogram of the right eye, showing an early bright hyperfluorescence and an adjacent area of hyperfluorescence. B: Mid frame showing homogenous filling of the PED, with sharp borders. C: Late frame showing homogenous hyperfluorescence of serous PED. An area of hyperfluorescence is consistent with subretinal neovascularization associated with the PED. D: Early frame of ICG-Angiography of the same eye showing round hypofluorescence with sharply demarcated borders typical for serous PED. A nasal hot spot is consistent with CNV. E: Late ICG-angiography frame of the same eye. The round hypofluorescence remained with sharply demarcated borders, whereas the inferonasal hot spot intensified. F: 90° OCT scan, showing a large subfoveal smooth surface PED. There is minimal retinal detachment surrounding the PED. No intra-retinal edema is seen.
PED. Because indocyanine green angiography (ICGA) affords better visualization of CNV beneath serous PED than FA, it is an important adjunct to the diagnosis and classification of patients with occult CNV associated with serous PED as demonstrated on FA.\textsuperscript{9,46,85,100,113,128,129} Serous PED was described as a hypofluorescent lesion on ICGA, typically remaining hypofluorescent in all phases of the angiography,\textsuperscript{129} (Fig. 5), although others have found that serous PED could be hypofluorescent, isofluorescent, or even hyperfluorescent with respect to the background choroidal fluorescence during late stages, possibly as a result of lipid accumulation in Bruch’s membrane.\textsuperscript{90} Flower noted apparent fluorescence of fluid beneath PED in fundus camera early phase ICGV images that appeared to be attributable to serous fluid light-scatter arising from adjacent fluorescent structures,\textsuperscript{38} probably as a consequence of the fundus camera optics and not due to the presence of dye. Yannuzzi termed the appearance of a hyperfluorescent area in the early phase of ICGA with leakage in the late phase as \textit{vascularized} PED associated with CNV.\textsuperscript{129} He identified a \textit{non-vascularized} type of PED as a round hypofluorescent area without spotty leakage, indicating the absence of an associated CNV (Fig. 6). In a subsequent report on ICGV examinations of patients with serous PED associated with occult CNV secondary to AMD evident on FA,\textsuperscript{128} Yannuzzi defined 96\% eyes as having a \textit{vascularized} PED and further divided them into two groups. A solitary area of well-delineated CNV, demonstrated on ICGA as a bright hyperfluorescent lesion no larger than one disk area, was defined as \textit{focal} CNV or hot spot (Fig. 7). A larger area of neovascularization with variable delineation, and usually with less intense fluorescence, was defined as \textit{plaque} CNV. The remaining 4\% of eyes in that study had no evidence of underlying CNV on ICGV. Similar results, confirming the superiority of ICGA in detecting CNV in patients with AMD-associated PED and its prognostic significance were subsequently reported by others.\textsuperscript{21,95,125}

Several works have attempted to identify specific features of PED associated with hot spots. In their study of 125 AMD patients with CNV associated with serous PED, Hartnett et al found retinal vascular abnormalities displaying either a feeder retinal vessel or an emptying venule in nine of them (7.3\%).\textsuperscript{60} The recognized communication between the retinal vasculature and a deep retinal complex in PEDs was detected angiographically as a feeding retinal vessel dipping toward the outer retina, with a sub-RPE component and leakage in late phase. Kuhn et al analyzed eyes with vascularized PED with hot spots to identify specific features that could explain the unfavorable natural history and poor response to laser treatment.\textsuperscript{72} In 50 of 54 (93\%) eyes, ICGV analysis showed anastomoses of mostly (90\%) a single or double retinal vein with CNV within the hot spot. The development of RCA was concluded as probably of an acquired, unknown pathogenesis and specifically related to development of vascularized PED. Weinberger et al evaluated alterations in the retinal vasculature overlying both vascularized and non-vascularized PED in
neovascular AMD using ICGV and FA. The detected retinal vasculopathy included microaneurysms, vascular leakage, and areas of non-perfusion. The abnormalities were significantly more detectable by ICGV than on FA, and their occurrence was directly correlated with presence of CNV. Iida et al stated that although the described retinal microangiopathies could be secondary to the longstanding macular detachment itself and not necessarily to the underlying pathology that caused the PED, they usually represent underlying polypoidal CNV.

Slakter et al further evaluated the incidence of RCA in patients with occult CNV and hot spots on ICG to determine clinical and angiographic features indicating their presence. They noted that RCA were present in 27% of patients with associated serous PED, as opposed to 13% in patients without PED. Most of the lesions were multiple anastomotic connections, and had at least one retinal vein involved. Clinical and angiographic features suggestive of presence of RCA included preretinal and intraretinal hemorrhage, cystoid macular edema, sudden termination of a retinal vessel, and serous PED in association with occult CNV with a hot spot at or near the retinal surface in the absence of a window defect evident on FA. On ICG, key features were focal hot spot adjacent to a serous PED and intraretinal late leakage surrounding neovascularization.

**B. FIBROVASCULAR PED**

Fibrovascular PED is a subset of occult CNV. Fibrovascular PED was defined as an area of irregular RPE elevation, best depicted on stereoscopic angiography, in contrast to the regular smooth-surfaced elevation of serous PED. The irregular elevation corresponds to an area of stippled or granular hyperfluorescence, which is not as bright as classic CNV and which emerges within 1–2 minutes of fluorescein injection (Fig. 8). Late-phase frames often reveal these areas to somewhat intensify in fluorescence and demonstrate persistent staining or leakage beyond the boundaries of fluorescence, the presence of elevation, or both, probably as a result of pooling in the subretinal space overlying the PED or entrapment within the fibrous tissue. Such a pattern was deemed sufficient to confirm the diagnosis of occult CNV. Other FA features described in eyes with fibrovascular PED include tiny focal hyperfluorescent pinpoint spots at the level of the RPE, arising in mid and late frames, which do not correspond to drusen or foci of depigmentation, and becoming brighter and slightly larger on later frames. Scant overlying subretinal fluid may also sometimes be seen.

As previously mentioned, ICGA is reported to provide more accurate definition of CNV underlying PED, thus allowing better appreciation of its precise nature and affording practical implications. In several studies of ICGA features of occult CNV, PEDs with irregular hypofluorescence, or a hyperfluorescent “hot spot” were correlated closely with CNV, prompting

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Fig. 7. A: ICG angiogram early frame of the right eye. A hyperfluorescent area within the round hypofluorescence is seen. B: Large area of leakage in the late phase representing a plaque CNV associated with serous PED.
recommendation for close follow-up. Yannuzzi et al analyzed 1,000 eyes with occult CNV using digital ICGV. As described earlier, the three angiographic types described were “hot spots” or focal CNV, plaque CNV, whether well- or ill-defined, and combination lesions. Plaque CNV was the most frequent finding, observed in 61% cases, and reported to occupy half or more of the area of the PED in 78% of the eyes. Focal CNV was observed in 29% of the eyes, usually extrafoveal in location. Combination lesions were observed in 8% of the eyes.

Haddad et al have used the nomenclature proposed by Guyer and Yannuzzi to classify fibrovascular PED, as noted on FA, on the basis of location of hot spot and plaque, and to evaluate the potential contribution of ICGA for determination of eligibility to treatment in eyes with AMD. Among 71 eyes with fibrovascular PED evident on FA, focal spots were noted in 39%, of which 31% were extra or juxtafoveal, plaques were present in 35%, and combination lesions were noted in 12%. Among all eyes with occult CNV examined within 15 days of symptoms, whether or not associated with fibrovascular PED, focal spots were visualized in 49%, indicating that up to half eyes with occult CNV would be converted to well delineated focal spots by ICGA.

C. DRUSENOID PED

Drusenoid PED, formed probably on the background of progressive enlargement and confluence of large soft drusen, is described as an RPE detachment with scalloped borders and an irregular surface, often with overlying orange-gray radiating hyperpigmentation and typical slow rate of enlargement. Roquet et al have analyzed the clinical features of drusenoid PED in AMD in 61 untreated eyes. Bilaterality was noted in 91% of cases, and the most frequent symptom at first examination was metamorphopsia (40%). The characteristic FA hyperfluorescence outlined for drusenoid PED is gradual staining of the sub-RPE with no leakage and possible irregular density (Fig. 9). The delayed hyperfluorescence is often sprinkled by hypofluorescent foci corresponding to pigment...
Fig. 9. A: Early frame FA showing a hypofluorescent area with scalloped borders and central element of irregular hyperfluorescence. B: In mid phase, gradual staining of the sub-RPE is noted. C: Delayed staining without leakage suggestive for drusenoid PED. D: ICG-A frame showing an area of hypofluorescence. E: OCT image horizontal scan. Three PEDs with homogenous hyper-reflectivity underneath. Small hyper-reflective small dots above the PED with shadowing below corresponding with pigmented changes. Neuroretinal cystic changes above the PED. No subretinal fluid is seen. F: Oblique scan. Small RPE elevations surrounding one large central PED corresponding with drusenoid changes. The RPE elevations are with solid hyper-reflective material. Small hyper-reflective areas above the elevations are pigmented lesions with a shadowing effect. No subretinal fluid is seen.
deposits, and is usually smaller and shallower than fibrovascular PED.\textsuperscript{17} ICGA was described in Roquet’s work as very helpful in identifying and locating associated CNV, but to the best of our knowledge, no specific features of drusenoid PED on ICG have been described.

IV. Optical Coherence Tomographic Images

Optical coherence tomography (OCT), a non-invasive, non-contact, high-resolution scan of the retina based on the reflective properties of its layers, creates cross-sectional images, and has been used to study macular disease states, among which are detachments of the RPE. Drusenoid PED, tears of the RPE, and retinal angiomatous lesions were also identified as lesions effectively demonstrated with OCT.\textsuperscript{97,123} The RPE, which is a highly reflective layer, appear red on OCT.

In the textbook of OCT of ocular disease,\textsuperscript{81} the definition drawn for serous PED secondary to AMD is a localized, relatively pronounced dome-shaped elevation of the external high reflective band that appears scatter-free, optically empty with sharp margins sometimes associated with reflections from the deeper choroid (Fig. 5). Fibrovascular PED is described as a well-defined elevation of the RPE with a deeper area of backscattering corresponding to fibrous proliferation (Fig. 8). Drusenoid elevation is seen on OCT as an RPE elevation with homogenous hyper-reflective material underneath, in contrast with the hypo-reflectivity seen underneath the RPE in serous PED (Fig. 9). Usually more than one RPE elevation is noted and there is no surrounding subretinal fluid. The retina overlying drusenoid PED can appear normal or harbor cystic changes, with small pigmented clumps associated with shadowing effect.

Yoshida et al\textsuperscript{131} classified 24 eyes with dome-like PED as seen ophthalmoscopically by OCT images to fall into two groups according to the presence or absence of a highly reflective line at the level of the RPE. In the first group, the same reflex was noted on OCT in the area of the PED as that seen in sub-RPE in other parts. Patients in this group demonstrated hyperfluorescence on FA, had smaller PEDs, and better VA. A partial or total highly reflective line at the level of the RPE over the PED defined the second group, in which irregular hyperfluorescence on FA, significantly larger PED, and lower VA were also noted. Although the authors did not state which group corresponds to which specific recognized PED type, it is agreed that PEDs in older patients tend to be associated with diffuse degenerative changes. OCT was formerly reported to be unable to detect CNV beneath serous pigment epithelial detachments.\textsuperscript{61} In a subsequent work, however, Sato et al\textsuperscript{102} studied the tomographic features of 35 eyes with CNV judged angiographically to be within or at the margin of serous PED in AMD. The PED seemed to be a dome-shaped, optically empty space lined by a highly reflective RPE layer in all eyes. In 56% of 18 eyes in which the CNV involved the angiographic margin of the PED, a smaller PED was noted as being adjacent to it, with a tomographic notch between the central and small PEDs. In 76% of 17 eyes in which the CNV was within the PED, a notch was seen in the central mound, resulting in a double-mound contour. A tomographic notch in a serous PED was, therefore, suggested as being diagnostically important as an indication of CNV.

V. Natural Course

Although the natural course is different for each PED type, they all share a common potential outcome. Tearing of the RPE is a sight-threatening complication of PED that usually occurs at the junction between the detached and attached portions of the RPE.\textsuperscript{33,65} The suggested pathogenesis is that a tangential shear force within the RPE causes dehiscence and separation of the epithelial basement membrane.\textsuperscript{8,42} Vitreomacular traction in the foveal area, demonstrated by OCT, has been proposed as another potential mechanical contributor to ripping of the RPE.\textsuperscript{83} Small areas of RPE thinning or small holes along the margins of PED have been proposed as characteristic signs of impending PED tears.\textsuperscript{109} RPE rip has been described either spontaneously, with or without associated CNV,\textsuperscript{7,13,18,42,45,74,120,130} after laser photocoagulation,\textsuperscript{41,12,139,132} and after photodynamic therapy (PDT).\textsuperscript{44,47,94} A study of angiographic pre-tear characteristics in 40 eyes with PED identified alterations in the filling pattern of the PED, the most noteworthy of which was uneven filling.\textsuperscript{28} Following tearing, the ripped RPE rolls toward the opposite margin, leading to sudden exposure of a bare Bruch’s membrane. A fibrous plaque typically resurfaces the bed of the tear, but it may sometimes remain stable or be replaced by new RPE.\textsuperscript{26,65} In most described cases, the patients experienced profound decrease in visual acuity.\textsuperscript{26,33,41,42,51,65,83,104,119,130} Several series have demonstrated significant risk of bilaterality, suggesting that specific alterations at the level of Bruch’s membrane may predispose to this complication.\textsuperscript{25,87,104}
A. SEROUS PED

The prognosis in eyes with pigment epithelial detachments is probably related to the presence of associated CNV and the age of the patient. Several retrospective studies have indicated that the overall risk for developing CNV within about 25 months after diagnosis among patients with serous PED associated with AMD is 24–34%. Development of CNV was associated with a final VA of 20/200 or less. Identified risk factors for developing CNV were age older than 60 years, a PED larger than 1 disk diameter, foveal involvement of the PED, and overlying sensory retinal detachment that did not decrease during follow-up. Additional risk factors were notching, a hot spot, and irregular filling of the PED on ICG.

In contrast, Pauleikhoff et al characterized the natural clinical and visual course of serous PED in 101 elderly patients and concluded that all PEDs, whether vascular PED, avascular PED, or associated with polypoidal choroidal vasculopathy, had a similar clinical course with respect to visual loss and enlargement or regression. In another study of the natural course of fellow eyes of unilateral CNV secondary to AMD, the same author reported that within 80 months of follow-up, patients with occult CNV with serous PED had a significantly higher risk of visual loss occurring in the second eye that of patients with CNV without PED. The annual risk of second eye involvement was increased after unilateral presentation.

Chang et al also studied the predictive value of occult CNV associated with serous PED regarding the nature of CNV that develops in the fellow eye. They found significant symmetric distribution of type of CNV between eyes among patients with occult CNV secondary to AMD, whether associated with serous PED or not. It was suggested that eyes with occult CNV secondary to AMD could be classified by the presence or absence of an associated serous PED, and that such unilateral findings are important with respect to the natural history.

B. FIBROVASCULAR PED

As defined by the Treatment of Age-Related Macular Degeneration with Photodynamic Therapy (TAP) and Verteporfin in Photodynamic Therapy (VIP) studies, fibrovascular PED is actually one of two FA-recognized forms of occult CNV. Thus, it could be expected that the natural course and the visual outcome of vascularized PED would be poor due to the development of classic CNV and ultimately, formation of a disciform scar or a tear of the RPE.

Tears of the RPE are reported to occur in 10% of patients with serous PED secondary to AMD, but CNV is considered one of the predisposing factors for tear formation in patients with PED. A tendency to bilateralization has been reported. Tears of the RPE are described as complicating PED and producing severe visual loss, especially when the macular area is involved. As the free margin of the torn RPE rolls toward the opposite margin of the PED and undergoes subsequent shrinkage, a large bare area of Bruch’s membrane is left, producing vision loss. Tears have been described to occur spontaneously, after laser treatment, and after PDT as well.

Coscas et al studied the characteristic angiographic changes of PED anteceding tear stage in 40 eyes. The most prominent feature observed was uneven filling of the PED, noted as a remarkably hypofluorescent central area that remained dark until late frames, or hyperfluorescence that appeared early at the margins of the PED, increased progressively, and sometimes demonstrated a crenated edge. Alterations in the filling pattern of the PED, including enlargement and modifications in its shape, development of notches, and the onset or increase of subretinal fluid, hard exudates, or hemorrhages were also noted and interpreted as characteristic preceding angiographic changes. The presence of these changes was suggested as an indication for high risk of tearing and careful consideration of laser treatment.

C. DRUSENOID PED

It is commonly agreed that drusenoid PEDs are usually consistent with good vision, especially in early stages. Roquet et al identified three natural outcomes of 61 eyes with drusenoid PED in AMD: persistence of drusenoid PED in 38%, development of geographic atrophy (GA) in 49%, and CNV in 13%. The 10-year occurrence rate was 75% for GA and 25% for CNV, indicating a better prognosis for drusenoid PED than for vascular PED. Hartnett also obtained best visual prognosis and anatomic results for PED associated with confluent drusen: They included flattening of the PED in 15/21 eyes, development into a serous lesion in 1/21 eyes, and persistence without change in 5/21 eyes within 41 months. Those findings were in contrast with PED associated with neovascularization, which had the poorest visual results.

VI. Treatment Options

A. SEROUS PED

In the past, certain cases of serous PEDs could be selected for laser treatment by one of three possible
Finally, photocoagulation of extrafoveal CNV with high reported success rate for flattening of the PED could be considered if the fovea could have been spared, with high reported success rate for flattening of the PED. A grid pattern photocoagulation could be considered if there was persistence and progression of the PED with associated visual decline but no underlying CNV was present, although no conclusive evidence that photocoagulation alters the natural course of this condition was noted. In cases when an underlying CNV was suspected, total photocoagulation of the PED could be performed in order to resolve the exudation and stabilize or improve the vision. However, with the advancement of imaging techniques and our improved ability to localize neovascularization beneath PED, most of the newly diagnosed patients with PED as a lesion component of advanced AMD are simply ineligible for such treatment options. As will be detailed subsequently, such patients are neither suitable for PDT as these lesions were excluded from the TAP study and VIP trial. Therefore, currently no treatment for serous PED is proven effective, nor are recommendations for treatment guidelines established.

The optimal treatment for serous vascularized PED also remains to be determined. The Macular Photocoagulation Study (MPS) showed that argon or krypton laser photocoagulation of extra and juxtafoveal CNV reduced the risk of severe visual loss at 5 years, and established treatment guidelines for eyes meeting those eligibility criteria. Eyes with PED as a lesion component, however, were excluded from the MPS study. In contrast with a few earlier descriptions, several more recent reports in the literature have indicated limited visual success of laser photocoagulation of eyes with CNV associated with PED in AMD. Closure of CNV continuous with PED and subsequent collapse of the PED after ICG-guided laser photocoagulation was described in 57% of 14 treated eyes, of which 75% also had visual improvement. Progression of CNV into the fovea with resultant visual loss, however, occurred in 43%. Similarly, others have observed anatomic collapse of PED in 81% of 21 treated eyes, and sustained visual improvement was obtained in 33% with a mean follow-up time of 27 months, suggesting that laser treatment might be beneficial. No difference was found between eyes with CNV associated with PED that were treated with FA-guided argon or krypton laser photocoagulation, where vision improved or remained stable in 53% of the 124 treated eyes, with a mean follow-up of 16 months.

Based on the assumption that the enhanced ability of infrared light to demonstrate choroidal vasculature due to its higher transmission through the RPE may facilitate visualization of CNV beneath PED, subsequent studies were carried out to evaluate the efficacy of ICG-guided laser photocoagulation of CNV associated with PED. Gomez-Ulla et al reported anatomical and visual results of 11 eyes with CNV associated with PED that were treated with ICG-guided diode laser photocoagulation. There was complete closure with complete resolution of exudates and flattening of the detachment in 5 (45%) eyes. The VA tested in the final examination improved or remained stable in 6 (55%) eyes, indicating that diode laser may be at least as effective as conventional laser with a shorter wavelength. Others also noted that ICG-guided laser photocoagulation may improve or stabilize visual acuity in some eyes with FA evidence of occult CNV with PED. Several other works, however, indicated that ICG-guided laser photocoagulation in eyes with CNV associated with serous PED secondary to AMD does not appear to improve VA compared to observation.

Axer-Siegel et al were the first to report on the visual and anatomic outcome of patients with subfoveal occult CNV associated with serous PED of at least 1 disk diameter who were treated with PDT. In their patient cohort, 19 (56%) treated eyes lost 3 or more lines of VA, 7 (21%) lost 1 or 2 lines, 6 (18%) maintained their initial acuity and 2 eyes (6%) gained 1 or 2 lines. Severe visual loss occurred in 4 eyes (11%), however, due to subretinal hemorrhage or tear of the RPE, warranting further search of treatment modalities for eyes with CNV associated with serous PED.

Another treatment modality, described recently by Costa et al as a pilot trial, is photothrombosis at the neovascular ingrowth site using ICG injection followed by laser application. Occlusion of the feeder vessel with cessation of leakage, restoration of macular architecture and visual improvement were induced in two patients with CNV associated with PED.

B. FIBROVASCULAR PED

The AMD arm of the VIP trial investigated whether PDT could safely reduce the risk of vision loss in patients with subfoveal occult with no classic CNV who have presumed recent disease progression. Occult CNV was defined as one of two possible fluorescent patterns on FA: The first, fibrovascular PED, was described as irregular elevation of the RPE that showed stippled or non-homogenous hyperfluorescence, usually within 1-2 minutes of injection, with boundaries that could be well or poorly demarcated and with persistent staining or late
leakage. The results from the VIP trial indicated that PDT could significantly reduce the risk of moderate and severe vision loss among patients with subfoveal occult CNV, because 121 (54%) treated eyes compared with 76 (67%) eyes in the placebo (control) group lost at least 15 letters, whereas 67 (30%) of the treated patients versus 54 (47%) of the controls lost at least 30 letters by 24 months. A subgroup analysis revealed that a greater benefit was achieved in lesions smaller than 4 disk areas or less and for lower levels of VA (i.e., a letter score of less than 65).

In the same study, 10/225 patients with AMD in the treated group versus none in the control group reported severe visual loss of 20 letters compared with pre treatment acuity within 7 days after treatment. Eight of them had occult with no classic CNV at baseline examination. The presumed causes for these events were presence of sub RPE blood in 3/10, extensive sub RPE fluid in 1/10, and in 6/10 no obvious cause could be found.

Recently, the use of intravitreal pegaptanib, an anti-vascular endothelial growth factor, was evaluated in the treatment of neovascular AMD in a prospective multicenter double-blind controlled clinical trial. Inclusion criteria included patients 50 years of age and older with all angiographic subtypes of subfoveal CNV secondary to AMD and VA in the range of 20/40 to 20/320 in the study eye and 20/800 or better in the second eye. One of three possible doses of intravitreal pegaptanib was administered every 6 weeks over 48 weeks. All three doses of pegaptanib were reported as effective in reducing risk of moderate and severe visual loss as well as increasing chance of maintaining or gaining of visual acuity in comparison with control. No evidence was found that any angiographic subtype, lesion size of CNV, or level of baseline VA precluded a treatment benefit. Although the long-term safety of pegaptanib therapy is not yet known, it appears to be effective for CNV secondary to AMD, and widening use of this new treatment modality is expected to gain popularity in the near future.

C. DRUSENOID PED

The rapid progression of neovascular AMD makes detection in its early stage likely to play a vital role in reducing the chance of severe visual loss. Therefore, for people over 65 years of age, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends an eye examination every 2 years, and it is commonly agreed that people over 50 years of age should have regular eye examinations and carry out self-monitoring tests using the Amsler grid. Our in-depth literature search yielded no publications on treatment options specific for drusenoid PED.

VII. Summary

PED is a prominent clinical manifestation of what appears to be multiple disease processes. It often contributes to loss of central vision, whether or not it is related to the presence of CNV. The clinical finding of single or multiple elevated mounds could be related to one of several different entities and is an indication to perform angiography with fluorescein and indocyanine green. Serous PED, the type that demonstrates intense regular hyperfluorescence that remains bright with sharp borders in late frames, is described as potentially obscuring an underlying CNV. Although several case series have observed anatomic collapse of PED associated with CNV after treatment with argon or krypton laser, universal treatment guidelines have yet to be determined and randomized clinical trials are needed in order to establish the efficacy and safety of treatment protocols of these lesions. On the other hand, the fibrovascular type of PED, defined as an area of irregular elevation corresponding to granular hyperfluorescence with persistent staining or leakage in late frames, is one of two recognized forms of occult CNV that warrants PDT when it is subfoveal. Therefore, correct recognition of the various types of PED that are possible in AMD is essential for correct prognosis and treatment recommendations.

VIII. Method of Literature Search

A thorough search of MEDLINE with PubMed was conducted for the words: retinal pigment epithelium detachment, retinal pigment epithelium detachment and age-related macular degeneration, PED and retinal pigment epithelium detachment, fluorescein angiography and age-related macular degeneration, PED and photodynamic therapy, pegaptanib, PED and retinal choroidal anastomoses. All years were searched (through 2006). All articles relating to PED in relation to AMD were included. Articles in foreign language with abstracts in English were included as well.

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The authors reported no proprietary or commercial interest in any product mentioned or concept discussed in this article. The authors thank Esther Eshkol for English language medical copyediting.

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