

Final Diagnosis: Chicken Handler's Hand

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Volume 1 Issue 1- 2018

Received Date: 18 Sep 2018

Accepted Date: 08 Sep 2018

Published Date: 15 Oct 2018

1. Case Presentation

A 30 year-old man came to see me because I had seen his mother in the past. He wondered whether he had a “thyroid problem.” His review of systems was entirely unremarkable except for intermittent fatigue. He worked the graveyard shift on a poultry farm. For those not familiar with shift work, this period is 11-12 PM to 7-8 AM. On exam, everything was normal except the hands. The photo is of the left hand but the right hand showed similar changes. His thyroid function studies were normal as was his CBC, serum chemistries, blood glucose, liver function studies, and urinalysis.

The key the diagnosis was the patient's occupation.

Poultry farming is a large manufacturing business. At night when the chickens quiet, they are picked up by handlers. How do you gather hundreds of birds and placed them in crates for transportation to the abattoir? The handler reaches under the bird slipping his fingers between the legs, flips the bird upside down, carrying them (often two/three at a time) as a waitress/waiter carries several wine glasses at a time. Chicken legs are rough and scaly and act as sandpaper on the inner surfaces of the fingers which leads to calluses.



Figure Legend: The photo demonstrates hypertrophied skin without ulceration or painful surfaces. He had no complaints about his hands. They looked like calluses but in most unusual locations.

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