DISCUSSION

Cashew nut tree (anacardium occidentale) belongs to the anacardiaceae family, which includes the common poison ivy (Rhus radicans), western poison oak (R. toxicodendron), poison sumac (R. vernix) and others. These plants are the most frequent cause of allergic contact dermatitis worldwide (2).

The cashew apple (pseudocarp or false fruit) is a red or yellow 5-11 cm long pear-shaped structure. It is edible, although it has a highly astringent taste if eaten raw. It is also used to make jam, liquor or soft drinks.

The raw cashew nut contains a highly irritating oil located between the 2 layers of its shell (1). After appropriate processing (initial heating followed by use of water and agitation or sawdust and vibrating cleaner), most of the oil is removed and cashew nuts are edible (1).

Cashew oil contains 3 main allergens: two phenols, anacardic acid and cardanol and a resorcinol, cardol, considered as the most active allergen (3). They are chemically related to urushiol (Rhus antigens) and can trigger allergic contact dermatitis.

Poison-ivy like dermatitis has been reported in persons who consumed improperly processed cashew nuts (3). Patients with strong patch test positivity to poison ivy urushiol usually have the most severe dermatitis. In the present case, the patient had no previous known history of sensitization to poison-ivy and had previously eaten roasted cashew nuts without reactions. Although the patient does not remember any liquid on her skin, contact with contaminated fingers cannot be ruled out, which could explain the immediate reaction.

Pruritic rash appears usually 1 to 8 days after consumption and can last several weeks (3). Children playing with fresh cashew nuts, professionals harvesting nuts, people in contact with imported toys or jewels made out of nut shell can be affected. Cashew nuts are known as food allergen and are responsible for anaphylaxis and systemic contact dermatitis after ingestion.

CONCLUSION

Cashew apple is unknown in Europe. When invited to taste local fruit, travelers should be informed which part is edible. Limited contact with the shell of the cashew seed resulted in this patient in immediate and delayed long lasting dermatitis.

REFERENCES