

# Which disease-related messages would patients with Hidradenitis Suppurativa tattoo on their skin?

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**Background:** Tattoos has been found in 37% of French HS patients, suggesting their potential cathartic effect (Guillem et al. *Dermatology* 2020)

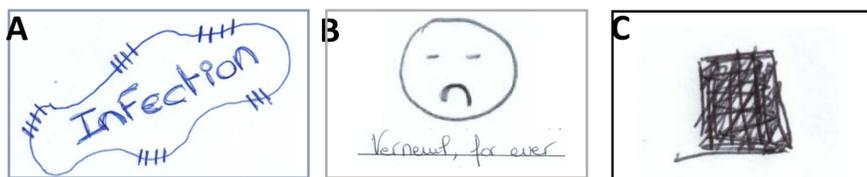
**Methods:** 75 patients (women 71%) with HS were asked to imagine HS-related tattoos.

**Results:** Tattoos were imagined

- on upper (41%), lower (21%) limbs, back (25%), or anterior chest (16%)
- dedicated to oneself (76%), relatives (16%), other people (9%), other HS patients (6%) and/or the disease (6%)
- black (39%), colored (23%) or both (38%)
- with text (26%), drawing (29 %) or both (45%).

Tattoo-underpinned themes included the claim of being ill (8%), a life slogan (38%), the fight against the disease (33%), the hope for a cure (22%) and/or freedom (lost or expected; 12%). HS was nevertheless the main theme (52%) including clear denomination of the disease (15%), description of the medical signs (lesions=18%, flares=15%, scars=12%, wounds=6%, infection=3%), severity (6%) or diagnostic delay (6%). HS consequences were evoked such as pain (24%), altered quality of life (6%), feeling of being closed (9%) or isolated (6%), and psychological suffering (15%).

**Conclusion:** When asked to voluntarily modify their skin with potentially painful tattoos, patients express their will to be recognized as suffering from a debilitating condition they have to fight. (Virtual) tattooing may be considered as art-therapy.



A. « A shape that would represent a mark with stitches », to be located in black and white in the left iliac fossa and dedicated to the patient herself.

B. A black sad smiley designed to be under the feet of a 45-yr-old woman, along with a message naming the incurable disease (Verneuil's disease is the usual French name of HS)

C. A black mask to be tattooed on « boils » in an attempt of a 26-yr-old woman to hide the disease

D. This text would be tattooed in two black parts on the calfs of a 40-yr-old woman and dedicated to « herself and the others »

E. How can we not think of a disease flare when seeing this drawing (a volcano thought in black, blue and red) designed by a 31-yr-old man for his back and as a message for himself

F. This tattoo was imagined by a 26-yr-old woman as an encouragement for fighting, dedicated to « herself and the other affected people ». The impact on the skin would be yellow while the boxing glove would be red

G. A fireball dedicated to the disease itself and designed to be on the arm of a 36-yr-old man; on the left: « black for the pain »; on the right: « red for the fire »; a clear representation of the disease and the consequent pain

H. A « pastel colored » flying butterfly designed for the infraclavicular region of a 29-yr-old woman and dedicated to herself. Note that the butterfly is unusually shown in profile, showing, instead of the drawing of spread wings, HS-like spots

I. The imagined red tattoo of this 21-yr-old woman would associate this text with a bird (not drawn); it would be dedicated to herself and located on the arm or on the back

J. This tattoo, to be located in the back, was imagined in grey-black by a 25-yr-old woman for herself: « two hands snatching my skin, as a clothe is snatched. A drop of blood would be added at each surgical procedure »

K. Word cloud performed with the most frequent words used to described the imagined tattoos (the size of the word is proportional to its prevalence within all the textual descriptions).

L. « As a stop sign »: a message dedicated to the disease and imagined on her wrist by a 37-yr-old woman

M. Bottom-up: « pink skin / red (wound) / black (cage) incarceration / red ring (suffering, all the negative) / green ring (free life) / freedom (me) family ». This drawing, from a 45-yr-old woman, would be tattooed on the left scapula, along with a text meaning « free, at last ! »

N. A « flower » imagined in black and red for the left thigh of a 25-yr-old woman and dedicated to her grand-mother as a symbol of « personal development »

O. A life slogan to be tattooed in blue-black on the inner arm and dedicated to himself by a 35-yr-old man

