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An unusual intracardiac foreign body following penetrating thoracic injury

Keywords Cardiac foreign body; Thoracic trauma; Pericardial sac

Foreign bodies in the heart after thoracic trauma may result in fatal outcome [1]. We report a pendant inside the pericardium after penetrating injury that did not cause major cardiac injury with a favorable outcome.

A 20-year-old woman was admitted to the hospital following a motorcycle traffic accident. She hit a metallic barrier at a speed of 30–50 km/h. Clinical examination revealed several traumatic injuries but her most severe injury was a transfixing thoracic wound. Chest X-ray revealed a right hemopneumothorax, that was subsequently drained (Fig. 1). An unidentified metallic body was detected in the projection of the thoracic spine and the right cardiac silhouette. Computed tomography (CT) showed an intrapericardial metallic foreign body, close to the right atrium. Other traumatic lesions included a longitudinal manubrium fracture, a right sternoclavicular dislocation, and a left drained

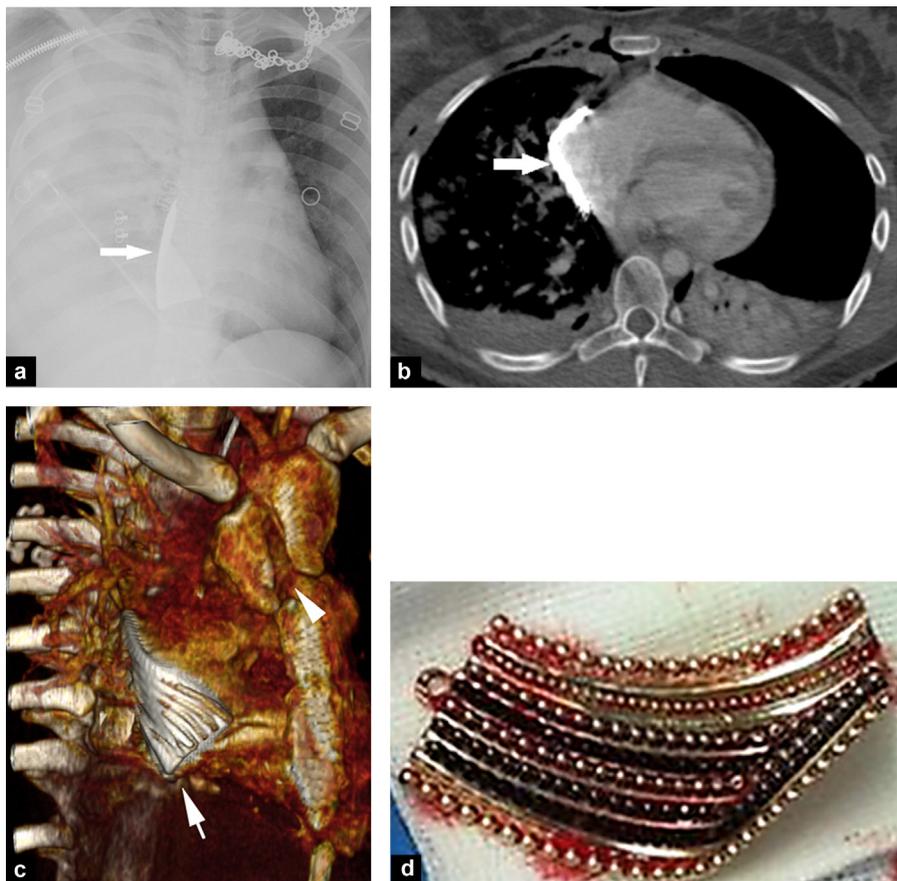


Figure 1. A 20-year-old woman with thoracic injury following motorcycle accident. a: chest X-ray shows a «white right lung» aspect associated with a dense foreign body in contact with the right cardiac border (arrow); b: computed tomography (CT) image of the thorax in the transverse plane shows a thin and regular metallic foreign body (arrow) adjacent to the right atrium accompanied by a left pneumothorax and right pulmonary contusion; c: three-dimensional CT image of the thorax reveals a linear and grooved foreign body (arrow), which is in contact with the heart, associated with a longitudinal sternal fracture (arrowhead); d: photograph shows the guilty pendant immediately after surgical removal.

hemopneumothorax. Exploratory thoracotomy revealed a foreign body nestled against the right cardiac cavities, which was responsible of a slight dissection of the right auriculoventricular junction. The foreign body was a 5-cm pendant. No complications were observed immediately after surgery. The clinical follow-up was uneventful.

Cardiac foreign bodies are rarely seen because most patients with penetrating cardiac injuries die from hemorrhagic shock or cardiac tamponade [1]. The most common foreign bodies that penetrate the heart are bullets and lawnmower projectiles [1]. Their mechanisms are known [2]. In our patient, chest fractures and wounds were due to direct impact. The handlebars of the motorcycle and/or the metallic barrier are the two potential causes of chest injury. Of interest in our patient, the impact to the pendant produced enough strength to cut the clothes, dilacerate the skin, fracture the sternum, and push the object within the anterior mediastinum. This all happened despite the slow speed. The direct impact focused the force on a specific and restricted portion of the sternum, provoking a longitudinal sternum fracture and pushing the pendant inside the thorax. However, there was no major cardiac injury. The foreign body was able to penetrate because of its position in front of an assumably weak anatomical mediastinal area. To our knowledge, only one case has been reported about a foreign body that came in contact with the auriculoventricular junction [3]. In our patient, the foreign body opened the pericardial sac and made its way next to the right heart cavities despite the existence of a large mid-thoracic wound. Our case also highlights the major role of CT in the management of trauma patient [4].

Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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