

## Diagnosis of opium body packing by plane x-ray and CT SCAN

Zare GA, Balali-Mood M. Medical Toxicology Research Centre, Imam Reza Hospital, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad 91735-348, Khorassan, IR Iran.

**Objective:** Opium body packing is a common cause of admission to the Medical Toxicology ward. Since the body packers are drug smugglers, they are mostly brought to the hospital by police. Those are alert usually deny of body packing. Ultrasonography, plane x-ray and CT scan are recommended for the diagnosis of body packing and stuffing. It was aimed to compare the diagnostic values of the 3 techniques in opium body packing. **Methods:** A questionnaire was designed to record all clinical and para clinical findings of all body packers admitted to the ward between 10 October 2000 and 11 October 2008. Ultra-sonography, plane x-ray and CT scan were performed for all body packers on admission and at certain intervals as clinically indicated. Magnesium sulfate was used as a cathartic in all admitted body packers, but naloxone was administered in symptomatic patients. The asymptomatic cases were under close observation both medically and forensically. The packets recovered in the feces were counted, weighted and collected by the police. The comatose patients with many packets who did not respond to the medical treatment or revealed bowel obstruction consulted surgically. The surgically removed packets were also counted, weighted and collected by the police. The results of the 3 techniques were compared with the clinical findings and the number of recovered packets. Statistical analysis (Chi Square test) was made using SPSS. **Results:** Out of 3281 poisoned patients admitted to the ward over the years, 490 patients (15%) had narcotic poisoning, of which 50 patients (5%) were opium body packers. There was only one female body packer (a 16 year old girl and a 35 years woman) with one of them had severe opium poisoning who went under surgery and expired a day later in ICU. Out of 48 male patients, 2 (30 and 69 years) had also surgery and expired. The other 47 patients aged 17 to 58 (mean 31) years were treated medically and all survived despite the severe intoxication in 18 of them. The body packers were either illiterate (28%), primary educated (32%) or secondary educated (40%). More than 44% of them were addicts. The number of packets varied between 1 and 48 (mean of 21) with weights of 6 to 102 (mean of 46) gm. Ultrasonography did not show any clear countable packets, whereas plane abdominal x-ray revealed the packets in 24 patients (48%) and abdominal CT scan were positive in 48 (96%) patients ( $p < 0.001$ ). **Conclusion:** 1. Ultrasonography is of no value in diagnosis of opium body packing. 2. Plane abdominal x-ray is simple but not efficient. 3. CT scan is the best diagnostic technique in opium body packing.