Images in...

Flail chest from blunt thoracic trauma

Michael Andrew Callaghan, Dermot Phelan

Intensive Care, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland

Correspondence to Dr Michael Andrew Callaghan, michaelcallaghan7@hotmail.com

DESCRIPTION

A 56-year-old male smoker sustained non-penetrating left-sided chest trauma, following a 2-m fall onto a flat-topped wooden post. He was in severe pain and respiratory distress in the Emergency Department, with a dramatic degree of flail and marked subcutaneous emphysema (see video 1). A left side tube thoracostomy was inserted urgently with marked improvement in respiratory parameters. Subsequent CT thorax confirmed left-sided haemopneumothorax, subcutaneous emphysema, multiple rib fractures and adequate chest tube position (figures 1 and 2). Analgesia was provided by thoracic epidural infusion of local anaesthetic and fentanyl. This allowed early chest physiotherapy and mobilisation, and helped prevent hypoventilation and sputum retention which may have led to respiratory infection and delayed recovery.¹ The chest tube was removed on day 3 and the patient was discharged home on day 5. He has since made a full recovery. Chest radiograph at 2 months is shown in figure 3.

Video 1 Flail chest.

Competing interests None.

Patient consent Obtained.

Figure 2 CT thorax showing marked left sided subcutaneous emphysema.

Figure 1 CT thorax showing left-sided haemopneumothorax, subcutaneous emphysema and tube thoracostomy.

Figure 3 Chest radiograph showing complete resolution 2 months postinjury.

REFERENCES

1. **Bulger EM**, Edwards T, Klotz P, *et al*. Epidural analgesia improves outcome after multiple rib fractures. *Surgery* 2004;**136**:426–30.

This pdf has been created automatically from the final edited text and images.

Copyright 2011 BMJ Publishing Group. All rights reserved. For permission to reuse any of this content visit <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>.
BMJ Case Report Fellows may re-use this article for personal use and teaching without any further permission.

Please cite this article as follows (you will need to access the article online to obtain the date of publication).

Callaghan MA, Phelan D. Flail chest from blunt thoracic trauma. *BMJ Case Reports* 2011;10.1136/bcr.04.2011.4068, date of publication

Become a Fellow of BMJ Case Reports today and you can:

- Submit as many cases as you like
- Enjoy fast sympathetic peer review and rapid publication of accepted articles
- Access all the published articles
- Re-use any of the published material for personal use and teaching without further permission

For information on Institutional Fellowships contact consortiasales@bmjgroup.com

Visit casereports.bmj.com for more articles like this and to become a Fellow