Longstanding periorbital foreign body

A case of an unsuspected long-standing periorbital foreign body is presented and the appropriate investigations and management are outlined briefly.

A 43-year-old woman attended the accident and emergency (A&E) department having sustained some contusion of the left forehead and eyelids whilst intoxicated by alcohol. She had no recollection of the circumstances of her injury. Her only symptom was of mild discomfort in the region of the bruising and clinically there were no orbital signs, but plain facial radiography revealed a large left periorbital foreign body (Fig. 1). An unsuccessful attempt was made by the A&E registrar to extract the object per nasum. The following day she attended the ophthalmology clinic where, on detailed questioning, she recalled that 11 years previously one of her children had inserted a disposable ball-point pen into her nose. She had retrieved the pen herself, sustaining a minor epistaxis, but was unaware that the metallic end-piece of the pen had been retained. A full ocular and orbital examination failed to reveal any abnormal signs. Since no ill-effects had arisen from the foreign body, no treatment was recommended.

The decision to proceed with surgical removal of such foreign bodies in the absence of a penetrating ocular injury or entry into the cranial fossae depends on the composition of the material and the functional sequelae of its presence. Indications for attempted removal are a reduction in visual acuity, signs of optic nerve compression, globe displacement (proptosis or enophthalmos) and ophthalmoplegia.\(^1\)

Pre-operative localization is best performed by computerized tomography (CT) which is superior to ultrasound.\(^2,3\) It should be remembered that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is contraindicated in the presence of a metallic foreign body which may move and further damage introrbital structures.\(^4\)

In general, metallic foreign bodies become rapidly encapsulated and are well-tolerated but organic particles tend to lead to suppuration, fistula formation or extrusion although this may sometimes be delayed for many years.\(^5\) Conservative management is often the most prudent approach as surgical intervention may result in far more serious complications than would have arisen during the natural course of events.\(^1\)

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REFERENCES

We also note that their interpretation of the term 'initial assessment' is at variance with that expressed by the NHS Chief Executive in a widely circulated document.¹

**METHODS AND RESULTS**

We conducted an interview-based survey of all patients attending the A&E Department of St Bartholomew's Hospital from 17 to 24 August 1992. This is an inner-city department serving a mixed commuter and residential population and 40,000 new patients present per year.

A pilot study was performed in which patients were asked to complete a questionnaire handed to them by the reception clerk. A very poor completion rate (10%) and misinterpretation of several questions led us to adopt an interview-based approach. Medical staff and volunteer medical students mounted a 24-h rota in an attempt to intercept every patient attending the department in the 7-day period. They asked standardized questions from a pre-printed questionnaire (patients not interviewed were sent a postal questionnaire).

A total of 584 patients were registered during the course of the study, of whom 404 were interviewed on their initial attendance (69%). A further 47 responded to the postal questionnaire, giving a total of 451 data sets. The interviewers recorded 51 cases in which they were unable to conduct the interview because of communication difficulties, lack of cooperation or severity of illness. The completion rate among the 533 patients who were in a position to complete the questionnaire was 85%.

There were variable rates of response for each of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>No. of patients</th>
<th>Response rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Were you aware of your guarantee of immediate assessment on arrival in the A&amp;E department?</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What period of time do you think is appropriate for 'immediately'?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Within 1 min</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) 5 min</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) 15 min</td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) 1 h</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Longer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who do you think should perform your initial assessment?</td>
<td>155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Doctor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Nurse</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Receptionist</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Facsimile of the questionnaire
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