LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Re: ‘Hunt the Thimble’: a study of the radiology of ingested foreign bodies

Sir

It was with interest that we read the paper by Boothroyd et al. (Archives of Emergency Medicine 4, 33–8) on the radiology of ingested foreign bodies. We are, however, somewhat concerned by the suggestion that radiographic investigation is not required in the asymptomatic child.

We have recently concluded a short prospective study of the ingestion of foreign bodies in 50 children and on two occasions we have had cause to alter our management as a result of radiological investigation. In one case, a coin was impacted in the cardio-oesophageal junction after ingestion and in another child, a coin was still within the stomach 3 weeks after it was first ingested. In both these cases, the patients were entirely asymptomatic throughout.

While we agree with the authors in deploiring the over-investigation of these cases, we feel that it is essential to use radiology to at least ensure that the radio-opaque foreign body is safely below the diaphragm.

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Sir

The article by Boothroyd et al. (Archives of Emergency Medicine 4, 33–8) draws attention to an area of presumed over-use of radiology in accident and emergency (A & E) departments. Unfortunately, they do not state whether the initial clinical impression recorded in the case notes was kept separate from the radiological impression at the time of reviewing patients X-rays—if the films were reviewed at all! If such was not the case, significant observer bias will have entered the trial and may have rendered their thesis unproven.

A prospective study specifically keeping apart the clinical data and radiological findings would be much less misleading and would enable decisions regarding the X-ray request to be made with the same information that the Casualty Officer would have possessed when the patient first presented.

While in no way condoning over-investigation of patients in A & E departments, we wonder whether the authors would be willing to defend an A & E SHO in court who, following the advice in their article, did not X-ray the 11 year old child whose X-ray is