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 deploring 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