An unusual cause of cardiac arrest in a hospitalized patient

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ABSTRACT

We present an unusual case of a 24 year old male who was hospitalized for dental procedure and subsequently developed cardiac arrest 2 days following the procedure. The patient presented with swelling of buccal cavity for which a biopsy was taken. Two days following the procedure, apparently normal patient suddenly presented at night with VT and VF, which were intractable requiring multiple DC shocks. During this period arterial blood gas analysis revealed severe acidosis. The circumstances led us to suspect poisoning as one of the cause for his medical condition. We looked for commonly available toxins. One of the commonly available toxins is hand sanitizer which contains Isopropyl alcohol, glycerin and perfume. Due to prolonged cardiac arrest and intractable arrhythmia patient had sustained hypoxic brain injury. Patient remained hemodynamically stable for next 9 days although his CNS status did not improve. Patient succumbed to sepsis on 9th day. Healthcare professionals should be aware of such possibilities and treat the patients at the earliest and put a check on the easy availability of IPA based hand sanitizers.

Key words: Cardiac arrhythmia, hand sanitizer, isopropyl alcohol, poisoning

INTRODUCTION

Cardiac arrest in young without structural heart disease is uncommon. We present an unusual case of a 24 year old male who was hospitalized for dental procedure and subsequently developed cardiac arrest 2 days following the procedure. The patient presented with swelling of buccal cavity for which a biopsy was taken. Two days following the procedure, the patient suddenly presented at night with recurrent ventricular tachycardia (VT) and fibrillation (VF), which were intractable requiring multiple DC shocks. During this period arterial blood gas analysis revealed severe metabolic acidosis. Electrocardiogram (ECG) revealed VT/VF [Figure 1]. Following termination of VT, His ECG showed deep T-wave inversion in V1-V5 [Figure 2]. Echocardiogram done showed a structurally normal heart. Patient had no preexisting medical illness. Subsequently detailed history from the wife revealed that the patient had a heated argument with his wife, after which he was not seen in bed for 2-3 hours. He returned to his bed at night. 2 hours later, patient was found to be unresponsive and cardiac arrhythmias were noted. The circumstances led us to suspect poisoning as one of the cause for his medical condition. We looked for commonly available toxins in the hospital. Patient had access to hand sanitizers which was freely available in the hospital attached to the walls. The constituents of hand sanitizer include Isopropyl alcohol (IPA), glycerin and perfume. His gastric lavage sample was analyzed by Head Space Gas Chromatography - Mass Spectroscopy, which revealed
the presence of IPA. Patient received intravenous fluids, thiamine and sodium bicarbonate. Since IPA was dialyzable, hemodialysis was performed. The acidosis resolved following two sessions of dialysis. However, due to the prolonged cardiac arrest he sustained hypoxic brain injury. Patient remained hemodynamically stable for the next 9 days although his conscious level did not improve. Patient succumbed to sepsis on the 9th day.

DISCUSSION

Cardiac arrhythmias and cardiac arrest in a structurally normal heart is uncommon. When it does occur in the young, it is important to consider poisoning or toxic ingestion as one of the causes.

Cases of isopropyl alcohol (IPA) based sanitizer poisoning are uncommon. Centre of Disease Control endorses the use of alcohol based hand sanitizers to prevent pathogen transmission.[1] In a few case reports, a prisoner[2] and a hospitalized patient had consumed ethanol based sanitizer. They underwent conservative management and recovered. A few cases with intoxication due to IPA based sanitizers have been reported.[3-5] These patients underwent aggressive hemodialysis and had an uneventful recovery. In our patient we could reverse the toxic effects of IPA with hemodialysis but due to intractable arrhythmias patient had sustained hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy and later succumbed to sepsis.

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How to cite this article: Shetty KR, Tumkur A, Bhat K, Chacko B. An unusual cause of cardiac arrest in a hospitalized patient. J Pharmacol Pharmacother 2013;4:72-3.

Source of Support: Nil, Conflict of Interest: None declared.