lay supine throughout the investigation. Red blood cells were labelled *in vivo* by intravenous injections of 15 mg stannous pyrophosphate followed by about 444 MBq (12 mCi) technetium-99 pertechnetate after 15 minutes. We used standard positioning techniques⁵ to position the probe over the left ventricle where the maximum stroke volume curves were recorded (these points were marked on patients' chests) and to obtain background readings.

We measured three baseline ejection fractions for each patient; maximum variation was 9% (mean 4.5%). Glyceryl trinitrate was then administered to five patients as a 500 µg sublingual tablet and to five by two puffs of the spray (800 µg), which was used in a way we thought to be consistent with the manufacturer's instructions. (The canister was shaken and then held vertically 2 cm from the mouth, delivery was directed at the surface of the tongue, and patients were instructed not to swallow or inhale the spray.) Ejection fractions were recorded at five minute intervals for 30 minutes.

One hour after ejection fractions had returned to baseline values (about two hours after the first dose of nitrate) the tests were repeated using the alternative administration. The background reading was checked before each administration. Patients were asked to report any symptoms after administration of the drug.

Administration of both preparations provoked a similar slight rise in heart rate but no consistent change in supine blood pressure. The figure shows that changes in ejection fraction were significantly less five minutes after two puffs of Nitrolingual spray than after 500 µg glyceryl trinitrate sublingually ($p < 0.005$).

The manufacturers found that the canisters used in the experiments contained 83% of their nominal content of glyceryl trinitrate.

Mean (SE) change in left ventricular ejection fraction (%) after administration of sublingual glyceryl trinitrate (●) and Nitrolingual spray (○) to 10 patients with stable angina.

Comment

Most authorities accept that benefits of nitrates depend, at least in part, on systemic vascular effects. We concluded from our data that Nitrolingual spray, used in apparent accordance with the manufacturer's instructions at the time, produced a less pronounced haemodynamic response than conventional sublingual glyceryl trinitrate. Our results differed from those of studies conducted elsewhere in Europe, possibly because British doctors and patients are accustomed to "shaking before use." Discussions with the manufacturers of Nitrolingual spray provoked by these results showed that shaking the canister may produce bubbles that impede delivery of the active agent.

A comparison of the two formulations in healthy subjects, in which plasma glyceryl trinitrate concentrations were measured, confirmed our results, but subsequent experiments with a modified canister head and without shaking produced bioavailability data for the spray showing a slightly larger area under the curve than that produced by the sublingual product (D E Davies, personal communication). Recommendations against shaking will therefore be printed on the packaging, and the canister head modified.

Nitrolingual spray was supplied by Lipha Pharmaceuticals Limited. We thank Mr T M Brown of Lipha and the manufacturer of Nitrolingual (G Pohl-Boskamp) for their efficient cooperation in identifying the cause of our discrepant haemodynamic data. The curve showing plasma glyceryl trinitrate concentrations obtained with the old and the modified canisters will be made available on request to us (by permission of Mr D E Davies of Simbec Research Limited and G Pohl-Boskamp).

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(Accepted 17 August 1984)

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Blast injury of the lungs due to lightning

Several reports of injuries sustained as a result of lightning strikes have previously been published. These, however, have principally recorded the results of the electrical component of the incident. I report on a patient who survived a lightning strike but sustained extensive bilateral pulmonary contusions and a perforated tympanic membrane, both attributable to the blast wave alone.

Case history

An 18 year old Zambian man was admitted to this hospital on 5 December 1983. He was conscious but knew nothing of how he came to be in hospital. The history was obtained from two witnesses. The previous evening they had been crossing open bush country in a thunder storm and walking widely separated from each other. A lightning bolt struck somewhere very near to the patient, whom they found shortly afterwards lying on the ground. After several minutes he was able to rise to his feet and with their help completed the journey home. During the evening his breathing became increasingly laboured, and he was brought to hospital. He did not vomit.

On examination his respiratory rate was 80 breaths/minute at rest. His pulse rate was 118 beats/minute and regular, and his blood pressure was 100/70 mm Hg. Surgical emphysema was found in the right supraclavicular fossa extending up the right side of the neck. He was not cyanosed. Auscultation showed extensive bilateral pulmonary crepitations. The left tympanic membrane was ruptured (the right was obscured by wax). A

Chest radiograph showing bilateral patchy consolidation with mediastinal and right supraclavicular emphysema and no fractures.

Careful examination showed no burns. He remained without a fever throughout his admission.

He was nursed in bed and received benzylpenicillin 500 000 units four times daily for four days and oxygen via a nasal cannula. Chest radiography (figure) showed bilateral patchy consolidation, more noticeable on the left, with mediastinal and right supraclavicular surgical emphysema and no fractures. He made a rapid, uneventful recovery and was discharged home four days later with only a few persisting pulmonary crepitations. As is common in this region, he failed to attend for review.

Comment

Injuries resulting from electrical contact with lightning have included neurological effects,¹ burns,^{1,2} cardiorespiratory arrest,³ and severe localised tissue damage.⁴ A lightning bolt, however, also causes sudden heating and expansion of the air through which it passes, producing strongly positive then negative pressure waves, which result in the familiar thunder clap. The injuries sustained by this patient were attributable to this blast effect alone and were compatible with the pulmonary lesions reported by Zuckerman from experimental explosions.⁵ The patient had no burns; I suggest that the actual lightning strike was to a nearby object and that he was not actually in contact with the electrical discharge.

No other clear case of pulmonary blast injury resulting from lightning has been described, but in one case reported by Hanson and McIlwraith the heart and ascending colon were found at necropsy to be extensively bruised, consistent with blast injury; the lungs, however, were normal.²

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(Accepted 29 August 1984)

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Oblique rib views after blunt chest trauma: an unnecessary routine?

In recent years increasing attention has been focused on unnecessary radiographic examinations in the accident and emergency department.¹⁻⁴ We think that a further topic for review is the oblique x ray view of the ribs after blunt chest trauma.

Patients, methods, and results

The case notes of 1178 patients aged 6-95 who had had x ray examinations after blunt chest trauma were retrospectively reviewed. The time of presentation after injury varied from less than one hour to over a week. All of these patients had had a frontal chest x ray film and at least one oblique view of the ribs. Two hundred patients were identified who were thought to have had a rib fracture by the casualty officer interpreting the films at the time of presentation. The films of these patients were reviewed, the frontal chest and oblique views being evaluated separately. The relevant side of injury was known when the frontal film was viewed.

Of the 200 patients, only 155 were considered to have a fracture on the

Complications of rib fractures and x ray findings

Complication	Seen in frontal view only	Seen in rib view only	Seen in both views
Haemothorax/effusion	21	0	3
Surgical emphysema	3	4	0
Pneumothorax	1	0	1
Flail segment	1	0	2
Pulmonary contusion	2	0	1
Mediastinal widening	1	—	—

second viewing when the findings of both views were amalgamated. Fifty two patients who had a fracture shown in the oblique view had none visible in the frontal view. Most of these (32) had only a single fractured rib. One patient who had a normal frontal radiograph had five fractures visible on the oblique view. Four cases of surgical emphysema were recorded on the rib view alone but, of these, three had a pleural effusion visible on the frontal chest radiograph.

Forty four of the patients from the series had been admitted to hospital, 17 for reasons relating to their rib injury alone, the remaining 27 for other injuries. The table lists the complications recorded and compares the findings of the two views.

Comment

Of the 1178 patients submitted to radiological investigation 155 were shown to have a rib fracture. Simple analgesia is the treatment of uncomplicated fracture irrespective of the number of ribs affected. Analgesia is not withheld if no rib fractures are identified. Thus the value of the x ray examination is to identify those patients who have sustained a complication of their rib injury.

In this series 44 patients were admitted, 27 of them for a consequence of another injury. In these cases the oblique view did not influence the admission. Thus there are 17 patients who were admitted for reasons relating to their rib injury alone. Of these, 15 had a complication of their injury (such as a pneumothorax) visible on the frontal view which would have indicated the need for admission.

Hence out of the initial 1178 cases the decision was affected in only two by the inclusion of the oblique rib view. One of these patients (aged 81) had five fractures on the oblique view but a normal frontal view. It is a policy of our department that any person with four or more fractures should be admitted to hospital for observation. This patient refused admission but was seen again three days later with no untoward sequelae. The other patient (aged 50) presented two days after rib injury. A small amount of surgical emphysema was seen in the oblique view but not in the frontal view. This patient took his own discharge against medical advice and no follow up was possible. Though the failure to see a fracture is perhaps a little disturbing, the patient was obese and the frontal chest radiograph was underexposed; we suspect that a more satisfactory film would have disclosed the abnormality.

We think that our results justify the conclusion that routine oblique views are unnecessary in the evaluation of rib trauma, as they do not alter management appreciably. The only film required is the frontal chest radiograph, which in cases of trauma to the lower ribs may have to be slightly overpenetrated.

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(Accepted 10 August 1984)

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