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Wires out of the Back

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ABSTRACT

We report a rare complication of spinal instrumentation in a paraplegic patient who underwent insertion of a Hartshill rectangle system using Luque sublaminar wires for a fracture dislocation of his tenth thoracic vertebra after being involved in road traffic accident in 1997. The patient presented 8 years later with wires exposed and coming out of his back. The patient underwent removal of the whole system and the wound healed in three weeks with uneventful recovery. Patient cooperation is an important factor for the success of most if not all our surgical procedures.

KEY WORDS: Complication, Hartshill system, Luque wires, spine.

INTRODUCTION

Complications of spinal instrumentation are frequently encountered. They may be related to the patient's spinal pathology, the surgical technique or system failure (1, 2, 3, 4,6). The case we present is a complication that is related to the patient himself who was neglected at home, having complete paraplegia below the level of his injured tenth thoracic vertebra. He presented with wires not only exposed but coming out of his back. Patient cooperation is an important factor for the success of any surgical procedure, especially those with instrumentation.

CASE PRESENTATION

Our 30-year-old male patient was involved in road traffic accident in 1997 and had a complete paraplegia below the level of the tenth thoracic vertebra due to a compressed dislocated fracture. The patient underwent spinal decompression and fixation using a Hartshill rectangle and Luque sublaminar wires with no follow-up. He presented 5 years later with wires exposed and coming out of his back (Figure 1) that were noticed by a paramedic called to take care of the ulcerations in the patient's feet. There was no evidence of loosening of the system due to infection. The patient underwent removal of the wires and the Hartshill rectangular system. The wound was managed appropriately and healed with uneventful recovery in three weeks.

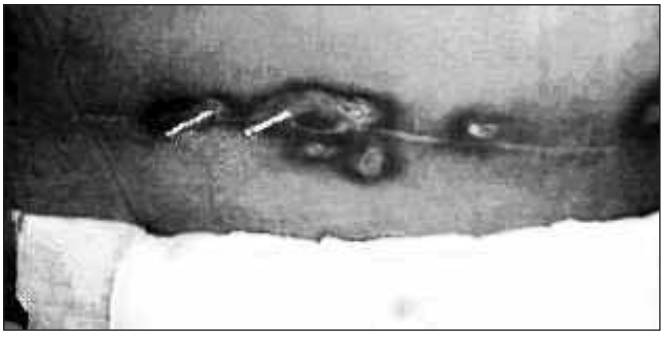

Figure 1: Wires out of the back

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DISCUSSION

With the new developments in surgical techniques, spinal instrumentation is now considered to be indispensable and plays a major role in dealing with spinal deformities (5). Failure and complications following spinal instrumentation are related to the patient's pathology, the surgical technique and system failure (1, 2, 3, 4, 6).

Patient cooperation pre- and postoperatively is also important to prevent failure and complications as emphasized in the literature. Although the Hartshill system and Luque wires are rarely used nowadays, wires out of the back are related to the patient education in dealing with his/her problem of paraplegia.

The loss of all motor and sensory modalities below the level of the lesion render the patient unable to detect was is happening in his back and lower extremities. The family care was also inadequate in our case. All patients should be instructed regularly and repeatedly about the way they should protect and deal with their fixation spinal systems.

Patient education and regular follow-up in the outpatient clinics or home care, which we lack in most of our institutions, are important factors in preventing complications such as wires out of the back in the future.

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