SUICIDE ATTEMPT VIA INTRAVENOUS INJECTION OF ELEMENTAL MERCURY. A CASE REPORT AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

ABSTRACT
Intravenous injection of mercury is a rare event. This report describes such a case and reviews the literature on previous incidents. A 26-year-old woman with a personality disorder intravenously injected herself with approximately 8 grams of metallic mercury in a suicide attempt. Physical, radiological, biochemical, and neurophysiologic examinations were carried out. The patient experienced transitory chest discomfort shortly after the injection. Mild inflammatory reaction at the site of injection developed later. Radiologically, mercury particles were shown to be deposited at the injection site, and embolized to the lungs, the right heart, and the splanchnic and the pelvic regions. Highly sensitive neurophysiologic tests revealed subtle changes compatible with an incipient neurotoxic effect of mercury. No other clinical and/or laboratory abnormalities attributable to mercury were observed. No serious mercury-related acute health problems were observed in the patient during two post-exposure weeks. The prognosis regarding late mercury-related sequelae is uncertain. Repeated follow-ups aimed especially at pulmonary functions, nephrotoxicity, and neurotoxicity are strongly recommended.

Key words: elemental mercury, intravenous injection, suicide attempt

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