

Haemorrhagic pericardial effusion in an asbestos worker

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KEY WORDS

Asbestos; asbestos-related diseases; pericardial effusion; pericarditis

SUMMARY

Background: Occupational exposure to asbestos may cause pleural and lung disorders and, less frequently, diseases of the peritoneum and pericardium. An exceedingly small number of cases of benign pericardial effusion have been described so far in the medical literature. **Objectives:** To report a rare case of haemorrhagic pericardial effusion caused by occupational asbestos exposure in a patient with pre-existent aortic regurgitation, bilateral pleural plaques and no signs of interstitial lung involvement due to asbestosis. **Methods:** A thorough clinical and instrumental evaluation (laboratory tests, tuberculin skin test, chest X-rays, transthoracic and transesophageal echocardiography, contrast coronary and aortic angiography, a histological examination of pericardial and pleural surgical specimens) was performed to examine all the known causes of pericardial effusion. **Results:** The tests performed did not demonstrate any specific cause of pericardial effusion. Surgical assessment three months later, during an aortic valve replacement, showed no signs of aortic dissection or intraparietal hematoma. A nine-year follow up did not reveal any reoccurrence of pericardial effusion. **Conclusions:** Asbestos related pericardial effusion is rarely described in the medical literature but must be considered in patients with previous occupational asbestos exposure. There are no specific clinical or pathological aspects indicative of this etiology and the diagnosis remains one of exclusion. A thorough occupational history should be obtained in patients with pericardial effusion of unknown etiology.

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