

DEFINITIONS

- 1 **Spontaneous rupture of the oesophagus** is a sudden tearing and perforation of the lower end of the oesophagus.
- 2 The **oesophagus** is a fibromuscular tube occupying the posterior mediastinum and extending from the cricopharyngeal sphincter to the cardia of the stomach. There are three physiological constrictions in this tube which represent the sites of anatomical narrowing. These constrictions are –
 - 2.1 **cricopharyngeal**
 - 2.2 **aortic and bronchial**
 - 2.3 **diaphragmatic**

CLINICAL MANIFESTATION

- 3 Agonising pain is experienced in the thorax and the patient soon becomes shocked. The pain is so intense that even intravenous morphine fails to relieve it.
- 4 Clinical diagnosis may be difficult, the patient often being thought to have a myocardial infarct, pneumothorax or pancreatitis.

AETIOLOGY

- 5 While the condition has been associated with marked increases of intra-abdominal pressure as in lifting a heavy weight or straining at stool, it usually follows vomiting during or just after a meal.
- 6 Instead of the cricopharyngeal stricture relaxing, as is usual during vomiting, it contracts. As a result, the pressure within the oesophagus rises so steeply that the organ bursts at its weakest point, this being in the posterior wall of extreme lower end of the oesophagus nearly always to the left side.

CONCLUSION

- 7 **Spontaneous rupture of the oesophagus** is a sudden tearing and perforation of the lower end of the oesophagus which invariably follows vomiting although it has been known to occur during marked increases of intra-abdominal pressure as in lifting a heavy weight or straining at stool. The great difficulty of clinical diagnosis may lead to delay in treatment.

REFERENCES

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