



Letter to the Editor

Detection of Cocaine Body Packers: The Role of X-ray Imaging

Détection de Body Packers de cocaïne : le rôle de l'imagerie à rayons X

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Dear Editor,

The concealment of illicit drugs within the human body, commonly referred to as «body packing,» has been a growing challenge for law enforcement and healthcare professionals. In particular, cocaine body packers pose a significant medical risk due to the potential rupture of drug-filled pellets, leading to severe intoxication or death. Given the increasing role of transit countries in drug trafficking, the use of medical imaging as a detection tool has become critical (1,2).

We wish to report a case that highlights the essential role of abdominal X-ray imaging and CT scans in identifying cocaine body packers. A 51-year-old male passenger was detained at Libreville International Airport, Gabon, under suspicion of intracorporeal drug transport. His travel pattern, lack of luggage, possession of a laxative (Xprep), and refusal of in-flight meals raised concerns among customs officers. Following legal authorization, he was referred to our radiology department for further examinati...

Abdominal X-ray imaging revealed multiple radiopaque, oval-shaped opacities distributed along the colonic frame. Subsequent non-contrast CT scans confirmed the presence of dense, well-circumscribed foreign bodies consistent with cocaine pellets (3,4). Under medical and law enforcement supervision, the pellets were expelled within 48 hours, confirming the diagnosis.

This case underscores the critical role of medical imaging in detecting body packers. While X-ray imaging serves as a rapid screening tool, CT scans remain the gold standard due to their superior sensitivity and ability to provide detailed localization and characterization of foreign bodies (5). In resource-limited settings where advanced screening technologies may be unavailable at airports, hospital-based radiological evaluation remains an indispensable strategy in the fight against drug traffickin.

The increasing role of Central African nations as transit hubs for drug trafficking highlights the need for greater awareness and improved detection

capabilities. We advocate for enhanced collaboration between healthcare professionals and law enforcement agencies to optimize early identification and management of body packers, ultimately preventing life-threatening complications (6).

Sincerely.

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