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Uses of error

Mistakes are lessons of the past

H S Bawaskar

A 16-year-old boy was bitten on his finger by a krait at 0300 h when sleeping on the floor of his hut. He reported to my clinic at 0500 h. He walked into my examination room, but he had bilateral ptosis, bulbar palsy, and was unable to talk. I gave him antivenom and intravenous atropine and neostigmine. As soon as I removed the intravenous needle, he vomited, aspirated, and died. A patient paralysed from an elapid snake bite should be treated in a semi-prone position and intubated.

A 6-year-old boy was stung by a scorpion and admitted to a rural hospital. I was called to examine the child. He had signs suggestive of an autonomic storm. I advised oral prazosin, and the staff nurse handed over the prazosin tablet to the mother for administration. The child refused to take the tablet, and the mother did not insist, as she was happy that the nurse gave him tetanus toxoid and scorpion antivenom injections. The child developed pulmonary oedema, and the medical officer transferred him to a cottage hospital without calling me. The child died on the way.

Prazosin is an antidote to venom and should be administered by a doctor or nurse. One should confirm that it has started acting by observing lowering blood pressure, improvement in peripheral circulation, a reduction in the heart rate and reappearance of local pain at the site of sting which was mild or absent due to vasoconstriction.

A 62-year-old retired man came alone from Mumbai to visit his village. He developed chest pain and bystanders brought him to my clinic. His electrocardiogram showed an extensive acute anterior myocardial infarction. I sedated him and gave him aspirin. I wanted to give him streptokinase but the bystanders would not pay, as they were not relatives. He was packed back to Mumbai, where he was admitted in cardiogenic shock and died within 12 h of admission. We have since kept 1.5 million units of streptokinase in the treatment room and given it to patients with acute myocardial infarct, without prepayment. We have treated 74 patients like this with good results.

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