

Diagnostic Challenge

A telltale heart: an unusual chest radiograph in a trauma patient

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CASE HISTORY

A 21-year-old male motorcyclist was involved in a collision with a car. He was hemodynamically unstable on arrival at a local hospital and was endotracheally intubated. Bilateral chest tubes were inserted for suspected hemopneumothoraces, and he was found to have a thoracic spinal fracture dislocation at the T8/T9 level.

The decision was made to transfer the patient to a tertiary trauma centre; however, this was delayed for 19 hours because of ongoing hemodynamic instability. On arrival at the trauma centre, it was noted that the left chest tube was not swinging; however, both tubes were

draining blood. Hemodynamic instability persisted despite the commencement of inotropic support. A chest radiograph was taken (Figure 1).

QUESTION

What is the most likely diagnosis?

- a. Congenital dextrocardia
- b. Cardiac torsion
- c. Tension pneumothorax
- d. Tension mediastinum
- e. Pulmonary contusion

For the answer to this challenge, see page 315.

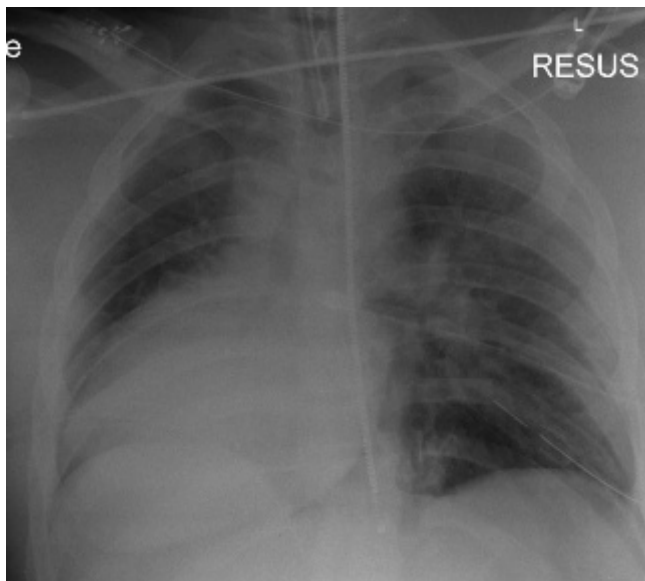


Figure 1. Initial chest radiograph showing dextrocardia.

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This article has not been peer reviewed.