Penetrating Stab Injury of the Thoracic Aorta
Beat Kipfer, MD; Thierry P. Carrel, MD

A 36-year-old male psychiatric nurse was stabbed in the back with a knife by a patient suffering from acute psychosis. After initial treatment in an outside hospital, he was transferred in stable cardiopulmonary condition to our department because a lung injury was suspected (Figure 1).

Computed tomography performed while the knife was still in place showed that the blade had penetrated the proximal part of the descending aorta. A periaortic hematoma had developed, but no injury of the lung parenchyma was demonstrated (Figure 2).

The patient was transferred immediately to the operating room, and an exploratory thoracotomy was performed using left-heart bypass through femoral cannulation as an adjunct. After cross-clamping the aorta, a longitudinal arteriotomy was performed in the anterior part of the vessel wall, and the tip of the blade, which had injured two-thirds of the circumference, was exposed (Figure 3).

After removal of the knife, the posterior wall was closed from inside using a running polypropylene suture. The aortotomy was closed in a similar fashion, and the patient was weaned from cardiopulmonary bypass without problems. Postoperative recovery was uneventful, and the patient was discharged 5 days after the surgery.

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(Circulation. 2000;102:1068.)
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Circulation is available at http://www.circulationaha.org
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Circulation. 2000;102:1068
doi: 10.1161/01.CIR.102.9.1068
Circulation is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 0009-7322. Online ISSN: 1524-4539

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/102/9/1068

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