Significance of assault injury of the hand

A case report

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Summary

A patient who developed septic arthritis of a metacarpophalangeal joint after penetration by a tooth in a fist fight is described. The importance of recognising such a lesion at the time of injury is stressed.

Punching an adversary in the mouth without the protection of a boxing glove can lead to a severe septic arthritis of a metacarpophalangeal joint if a tooth penetrates it. Any suspicious looking wound over the knuckles after a fist fight must be considered to have penetrated the joint; immediate exploration and lavage is advised.1-4

Case report

A 45-year-old man was referred to Tygerberg Hospital for an opinion on unresolved 'cellulitis' of the right hand. Five days before he had been in a fist fight and had sustained a laceration of the knuckle of the middle finger. The wound was sutured elsewhere, but he had returned there later complaining of severe pain. Early infection was considered, antibiotics were prescribed and alternate sutures were removed. The next day he was referred for a specialist opinion and was treated for cellulitis with elevation and parenteral antibiotics.

On examination in our unit the patient had obvious septic arthritis involving the metacarpophalangeal joint. Radiography revealed no fracture.

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