CASE REPORT

NECK INJURY CAUSED BY SKI STICK

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INTRODUCTION

This case report describes an unusual injury to the neck, caused by a ski stick, sustained by a skier on a dry ski slope.

The majority of equipment-related ski-ing injuries involve the ankle, knee and lower leg and are influenced by ski-ing experience and quality of ski binding; Young et al (1976). Johnson et al (1980) found that 80% of lower extremity injuries were equipment related. The number of thoraco-abdominal injuries has increased in recent years with the higher speed in ski sports; Scharplatz et al (1979). Injuries caused by ski poles are less common but modifications to the stick handles have been described to help prevent eye and abdominal injuries (Payer, 1980; Hipp, 1977).

CASE REPORT

A twenty-four year old man, while ski-ing on a dry ski slope, fell and sustained an injury to the right side of his neck from one of his own ski sticks.

He impaled himself on the stick, which had no ski-basket, and which entered the soft tissues of the neck just behind the angle of the mandible, and passed upwards subcutaneously to emerge through the skin over the mastoid process and protrude for 50 cm.

On admission to hospital there was some loss of sensation in the over-lying skin but no other injury. X-rays showed no abnormality.

Under general anaesthetic the superficial tissues were divided in the line of the stick and the stick removed. The wound was explored and found to be mainly superficial with some damage to the posterior aspect of the parotid gland but no vascular injury. Wound debridement and primary suture were performed.

He made a good recovery and three weeks later had some loss of sensation over the ear lobe but no other abnormality.

COMMENT

The hired ski sticks used by this skier had irregular metal tips and no ski-baskets. The ski-baskets are plastic discs usually fixed 4 cm from the tip of the stick. The ski-baskets are not as essential for the function of the sticks on dry ski slopes as on snow. However, their presence in this case would have helped prevent this type of through-and-through injury.

The use of plastic caps to the tip of the skis would also add a safety factor to ski sticks used on dry ski slopes without detracting from their function.

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