LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DO NOT FORGET: SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN "Ps".

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Acute limb ischemia (ALI) is a common emergency that can lead to loss of life or limb if not treated swiftly.

It occurs in 14 out of every 100,000 people per year. Despite a well-known acronym (the six "Ps") which describes the clinical picture of ALI (Pain, Pallor, Perishing cold, Pulselessness, Paresthesia and Paralysis) it is commonly mistaken for acute disc prolapse, Baker’s cyst, and deep venous thrombosis, or a complete failure for its possibility to be considered, especially in a young patient with no history of atrial fibrillation or current smoking.

The purpose of this letter is to reflect on the current acronym and to emphasize few points which might help the first line doctors. ALI can affect patients at any age and should be considered in the differential diagnosis of all patients presenting with leg pain of sudden onset, irrespective of age and risk factors. The mere presence of sudden severe pain, pallor and coldness of the limb, should alert the clinician that he is dealing with ALI. Loss of muscle power and sensation are signs of advanced ischemia.

Examination of peripheral pulses is not a reliable tool in this situation and hand held Doppler should be used.
To prevent propagation of thrombosis in to the small vessels which results in high vascular bed resistance and in failure of the graft, 5000 unit of HEPARIN (unfractionated) should be given IV immediately.

The management of ALI depends on the presence and the severity of reduced muscular power and reduced sensation:
1) The limb is not at an immediate threat If the patient can wiggle the toes and retains intact sensation. The surgeon might ask for imaging & proceeds with surgery.
2) If the patient cannot wiggle the toes but still has some reduced sensation, the limb is in an immediate threat and an emergency surgery is the answer.
3) Presence of profound paralysis, anesthesia of the foot and fixed mottled skin. Sadly, the limb is unsalvageable and the only option is to perform primary amputation to save the patient’s life (life is more precious than a limb).

I propose a new acronym which is easy to memorize "Snow White and the Seven "Ps". Number 7 is prevention of propagated thrombosis by heparin.

References: