A 19 year old woman with cystic fibrosis who developed tension pneumothorax following this procedure, with rapid clinical deterioration until the obstruction was cleared. To avoid this potentially fatal complication we recommend that “blood patch” pleurodesis be performed only through large bore intercostal catheters, that blood is rapidly transferred into the catheter tubing, a sterile saline flush and full resuscitation equipment is available, and the operator is skilled in the management of tension pneumothorax.

Autologous “blood patching” has been used successfully for the treatment of persistent air leak in patients with spontaneous secondary pneumothorax. The case history is presented of a 19 year old woman with cystic fibrosis who developed tension pneumothorax following this procedure, with rapid clinical deterioration until the obstruction was cleared. To avoid this potentially fatal complication we recommend that “blood patch” pleurodesis be performed only through large bore intercostal catheters, that blood is rapidly transferred into the catheter tubing, a sterile saline flush and full resuscitation equipment is available, and the operator is skilled in the management of tension pneumothorax.

A potentially life threatening complication of the autologous “blood patch” pleurodesis procedure performed for a case of secondary pneumothorax with persistent air leak is described.

DISCUSSION

Autologous “blood patching” has been described as a simple, inexpensive, and safe treatment for persistent air leak from secondary pneumothorax and following surgery, with success rates ranging from 59% to 100% in published series. It has proved to be successful even in cases where the lung is not re-expanded. The only serious complication described in the literature is empyema which, although thought to be rare by some authors, affected three of 32 patients (9%) in one series. With regard to the methods used for “blood patch” pleurodesis, there is little or no mention of the tube size used in these case series, although it is important to note that they were probably large bore.

Tension pneumothorax has, to our knowledge, never been described previously with this procedure, although the possibility was raised in a letter by Shackcloth et al. In patients with existing lung disease the deterioration can be very rapid due to lack of respiratory reserve, as was the case with our patient. We believe several factors contributed to catheter obstruction in this case. The use of a small bore catheter, prior instillation of blood during the first procedure, and slow venesection are all likely to have contributed to blood clot formation within the catheter and subsequent tension pneumothorax.

Based on our own clinical experience and published case series, we believe autologous “blood patching” is a useful therapeutic option in a selected group of patients with pneumothorax and persistent air leak. However, it is important that clinicians undertaking this procedure have an awareness of, take steps to avoid, and have the facility to deal with the potentially life threatening complication of tension pneumothorax. We recommend that (1) autologous “blood patching” be performed through large bore catheters only; (2) venesection from the patient be performed using 50 ml syringes from an intravenous cannula (≤ 18 gauge; 0.9 mm internal diameter) in an upper limb vein with rapid transfer of blood into the catheter tubing; (3) the catheter should be
flushed with sterile saline after each injection of blood and a 50 ml sterile saline flush should be available during the procedure to be used in the event of catheter obstruction; and (4) resuscitation equipment (including oxygen and pulse oximetry) should be to hand and the operator should be experienced in the management of tension pneumothorax with large bore cannulae and emergency chest drain insertion.

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Tension pneumothorax complicating autologous "blood patch" pleurodesis

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