Persistent Pneumonia Due to a Foreign Body

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A 48 year old man presented with right sided pleuritic chest pain, dyspnea, cough, and weight loss of 10 kgs over 4 months. He was diagnosed with pneumonia that did not respond to several antibiotics. He is dependent on methadone, and an addict to heroin snorting. Physical examination showed crackles at the right lung base. Imaging revealed right lung infiltrates and bronchiectasis (Picture 1) and a right main stem bronchus foreign body (Picture 2). Bronchoscopy revealed a foil packet in the right main stem bronchus (Picture 3). Upon extraction of the foreign body, the patient had rapid improvement. He mentioned later that he choked on a heroin packet several months previously during a police raid. Factors predisposing to foreign body aspiration include alcohol intoxication, sedative drug use, and impairment of mental status. The right main stem bronchus is the most common location for aspiration. Diagnosis is frequently overlooked because patients do not always recall a history of choking and chest x-rays demonstrate the foreign body in only one-third of the cases. Chronic cough is the main symptom and bronchiectasis is a late complication. Foreign body aspiration should be suspected in patients with persistent or recurrent pneumonia.