Sudden Death due to an Unrecognized Cardiac Hydatid Cyst

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Echinococcosis is a human infection caused by the larval stage of Echinococcocus granulosus. The most common sites of infection are the liver and the lungs. Cardiac involvement is very rare (0.5-3%) even in regions in which hydatic disease is endemic (the south Mediterranean countries and Africa). We report a case of a 28-year-old man, who died suddenly. According to his family he was an apparently healthy man without medical history; he was found dead in the bathroom. The post-mortem examination revealed a large cyst (6×8 cm) in the left ventricle of the heart with an intact wall (Picture 1) and a small daughter cyst protruding in the pericardial cavity (Picture 2, panel A). The cytologic examination of the cyst fluid demonstrated the presence of the characteristic scolices and hooklets and confirmed the diagnosis of cardiac hydatid cyst. Causes of cardiac sudden death involve different mechanisms (1) including ventricular arrhythmia, cardiac outflow obstruction or conduction tract disturbance, pulmonary and cerebral embolism, cardiac tamponade, and myocardial ischemia.

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Reference