



Pathology Biology Section – 2010

G27 Complex Suicide: A Case Report

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After attending this presentation, attendees will appreciate the need of a high index of suspicion for the diagnosis of a complex suicide and the importance of a full and careful autopsy.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by describing the diagnosis of complex suicides.

In 1974, Marcinkowski had proposed a general division of suicide. In this classification, suicides are first divided into simple versus complex. The term “complex suicide” refers to suicides in which more than one suicide method is applied and usually a distinction is made between planned and unplanned complex suicides. In planned complex suicides, the combination of two or more methods of suicide are previously planned and employed simultaneously in order to make sure that death will occur even if one method fails. On the other hand, in unplanned complex suicides, several other methods of suicide are tried after the first method chosen failed, if death occurs too slowly or when it proves to be too painful.

In planned complex suicides, typically two of the common methods of suicide (e.g., ingestion of hypnotics or other medicaments, hanging, drowning, use of firearms, jumping from a height) are combined. In unplanned complex suicides, injuries by sharp force, especially cutting the wrists, are often found as the primary act of suicide and then an appropriated method of suicide is use, more frequently hanging or jumping from a height.

A case of a complex suicide is presented where the victim shot himself in the head and hanged himself. The death scene investigation associated with the findings at the autopsy was very important to classify this complex suicide as an unplanned one.

The need, in some situations, of a high index of suspicion for the diagnosis of this entity is emphasized. So, a full and careful autopsy, including toxicological analysis, combined with the investigation of the death scene is mandatory in these cases. First, to exclude the possibility of intervention of another person in the death; and second, to allow a distinction between planned and unplanned complex suicide.

Suicide, Complex, Autopsy