G81 Ante- and Postmortem In-Human Cocaine Packs Detected by Computed Tomography

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After attending the presentation, attendees will understand how to detect intra-corporal cocaine packs on CT. The differences of body packing, stuffing, or pushing will be elaborated and the varying appearance of the packs in CT will be demonstrated. Further, the necessity of a tight collaboration of the custody ward, the forensic institute, and the radiology department will be shown.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the difficulties and pitfalls on CT imaging of drug mules, understanding the variety of drug containers, and the upcoming medicolegal issues.

Purpose: The goal of this presentation is to depict the findings on computed tomography (CT) in detection of concealed cocaine – filled packs in the alimentary tract of living and dead human transporters.

Materials and Methods: The study population consisted of 15 antemortem and one postmortem CT exams with detected intra-corporal cocaine containers. The images were assessed retrospectively by investigators with special training and experience in reading images of drug carriers. Radiological findings were compared with listed evidence in the feces or alimentary tract of each detained suspect or deceased victim.

Results: Cocaine-filled containers were detected by CT in each case. The appearance and morphologic shape were compared to the evidence secured on a custody ward or during autopsy. Window leveling from abdominal window to lung window of the CT images was crucial and allowed for correct diagnoses.

Conclusion: Reading CT images of drug mules needs special knowledge of the appearance of the various drug containers and of the important window leveling in order to detect even hypodense or tiny packs within the alimentary tract. A reliable and fast method such as CT is needed due to the limited space at custody wards to triage holding, discharge or transfer to regional prison. During the last years, forensic and medical issues have lead to an increasing number of if needed, judicially warranted CT examinations. Pre-autopsy postmortem scans allow for exact localization of incidental or suspected findings of foreign bodies such as in-human drug containers. Obviously, the radiologist needs to be well schooled in the appearance of the drug containers in order to diagnose those correctly – therefore a tight collaboration with the custody ward, the associated forensic institute and the radiology department is desirable.

Body Packer, Cocaine, CT

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