



### H56 Autopsy Findings of Individuals Displaying Symptoms of Pica

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to visually understand the physical complications of an individual who suffers from a mental disorder known as pica. Pica is an eating disorder that involves the individual craving and eating items that are not generally thought of as food and contain no nutritional value. Some of these items may include carpet fibers, hair, dirt, and other common household items. Pica is considered a dangerous and often deadly illness if not monitored due to the likelihood of intestinal blockages or perforations from the toxicity of the items that are sometimes consumed.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by displaying three cases of patients that displayed pica symptoms at the Mississippi State Medical Examiner's Office for autopsy and by exhibiting the pathological findings of each case.

**Case 1:** A 2-year-old, White male was found unresponsive in his playpen. His mother stated that he had been pulling at his ears and throat for some time before he was found. He had no known medical history and, other than not feeling well the past few days, was considered a healthy child. However, the victim's mother also stated that she had recently reached out for medical attention regarding her son missing milestones, such as walking and talking. At autopsy, the child's abdomen was severely distended, and he showed multiple lacerations to his face and mouth. Internal examination of the stomach revealed that the child had developed a bezoar due to his ingestion of foreign materials. These materials seemed to primarily include items such as carpet fibers, jean fibers, and hair.

**Case 2:** A 31-year-old, White male was transported to the hospital from prison after complaining of abdominal pain. The patient had no known significant medical history but had been anecdotally reported to eat the toothpaste tubes from the prisoner hygiene kits. At autopsy, examination of the gastric contents revealed multiple non-edible items including paper towels, toothpaste tubes, and apple juice cartons. The victim's ultimate cause of death was peritonitis from a bowel obstruction.

**Case 3:** A 19-year-old, African-American male was a patient at the state mental hospital and had previously been diagnosed with pica. During a transportation to facilities, the victim vomited what was thought to be fecal matter along with a latex glove. It was believed that the glove had become lodged in his airway for too long, and he later died from the incident. Upon internal examination at autopsy, it was found the victim's gastrointestinal tract contained items such as pens, plastic bags, latex gloves, and coins.

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#### Pica, Mental Disability, Foreign Material