

## **Drug trafficking – Two unusual deaths in body stuffers**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Ingestion of illicit drug packages is a well-known method used in drug trafficking. Deaths in body stuffers are rare. We present two unusual fatal cases of body stuffer. They smuggled drugs for their own use and selling purpose. In one case, the deceased who was carrying the packages of narcotics in his hand had swallowed those packages to avoid police detention. Another deceased was suspected to ingest the illicit drug package to avoid inmates and police in the prison. The autopsy findings of these cases revealed intact packages inside the body. The packaging used in both cases was excellent. The aim of presenting these cases is, to discuss fatal outcome and describe how to detect the body stuffers.

**KEY WORDS:** Drug trafficking, body stuffer, Autopsy findings

### **INTRODUCTION:**

During the last decade, the increased rates of drug trafficking and close custom control have led the smugglers to use various methods. One of the important means of illicit drug smuggling is body packing. Body packers are people who illegally carry drugs, mostly cocaine and heroin, concealed within their bodies usually in order to get across borders without being detected. The body stuffer, sometimes known as “mini packer” is defined as someone who admits to or is suspected of ingesting illegal drugs in order to escape detention by authorities, not for recreational purposes or to transport the drug across borders<sup>1</sup>. Many deaths have been reported in body packer syndrome due to drug overdose<sup>2-6</sup>. Reported cases of body stuffer deaths are rare. In 1989, Introna F and Smialek JE reported seven fatalities: two victims of body packers who were hiding large amounts of heroin in their body cavities to avoid US Customs and five cases of mini-packers who had swallowed a single bag of cocaine to avoid police detection<sup>7</sup>. In the year 2002, Fineschi reported a fatal case of cocaine “body stuffer” syndrome<sup>8</sup>. Norfolk GA reported one case of a 50 years old female body-stuffer who collapsed and died more than 10 hr. after swallowing a plastic wrap of cocaine<sup>9</sup>. In this study, the two fatal cases of body stuffers have been discussed together with a review of literature in order to highlight the fact that how the body stuffers differs from usual packers and doctors need to be aware of detecting and managing these individuals.

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## Case Description:

**Case 1:** A young male aged 33 years has been suspected by police for carrying illicit drug packages. When the police tried to stop him, he swallowed those packages and died within few minutes. The dead body was brought to the mortuary of Victoria Hospital, Candos, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius, for postmortem examination.

**Autopsy findings:** On *external examination*, the face was congested along with marked congestion of eyes. The nails and lips were cyanosed. The rigor mortis was fully established and postmortem staining at back except at pressure points. There were no violent injuries found on the body. On *internal examination*, two green color packages (**Figure 1**) were found: one at the level of carina in air passages and another in the stomach. Both the packages were intact and packing was excellent. One green parcel was opened at the time of postmortem examination. It contained 45 aluminum foil packets (**Figure 2**), which were packed with white powder. The petechial hemorrhages were present at epiglottis and posterior surface of left auricle. The brain and lungs were congested and edematous. Abdominal organs were also congested. The cause of death given was, asphyxia due to choking by foreign body.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Toxicological Analysis:** The two green packages recovered from the body, blood, urine and stomach contents were sent to forensic science laboratory (FSL) for chemical analysis. The stomach contents and blood were negative for the drug. Urine was positive for opiates. The examination of exhibits showed the presence of 45 aluminum foils in each parcel, which contained Heroin.

**Case 2:** A prisoner aged 39 years, ingested illicit drug packages to escape from inmates and police inside the prison. He was assaulted by inmates after suspicion of hiding drug packages and died before reaching the police. The dead body was brought for autopsy examination in the mortuary of Victoria Hospital, Candos, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius.

**Autopsy Examination:** External examination revealed multiple sharp force injuries mainly over upper part of body. Some of them were fatal in nature involving vital organs. In the mouth, a black cellotape wrapped package was seen (**Figure 3**). After opening this packet, eight aluminum foil packets were found that contained white powder (**Figure 4**). Abdominal organs were pale and abdominal cavity contained about one liter of blood. The cause of death was given as hemorrhagic shock due to multiple sharp force injuries.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



**Toxicological Analysis:** A black parcel containing 8 aluminum foil packets with white powder, blood, urine and stomach contents had been sent to FSL for examination. The stomach contents, blood and urine were negative for the drug. Chemical analysis of the white powder had revealed the presence of Buprenorphine (narcotic analgesic).

## **DISCUSSION:**

Death from the body packing of illicit drugs has been well described in the forensic literature. Most fatalities are mainly due to drug leakage resulting in severe toxicity. Recently, drug traffickers use more sophisticated packaging. The trafficking of illicit drugs by swallowing packets into the body was first reported in 1973, when a courier transported a condom filled with hashish to Canada<sup>10</sup>. After that many cases of body packer syndrome have been revealed. The “body stuffer” differs from usual body packer that people who ingest packets of illicit drugs or insert them into body cavities in an attempt to smuggle them are termed as body packers and the individual who does this attempt to hide the drugs when encountered by law enforcement is known as body stuffer<sup>11</sup>.

Body packers or stuffers swallow the packages with hope to retrieve after traveling. Severe toxicity and death may occur due to leakage of drugs from the packages inside gastrointestinal tract in both body packers and body stuffers. This is usually reported with cocaine and heroin. June et al identified 46 patients of cocaine body stuffers; of these two patients developed severe intoxication secondary to drug leakage and died<sup>12</sup>. Sometimes, stuffers insert packages into the rectum or vagina<sup>13</sup>. Kashani and Ruha<sup>11</sup> reported a case of intravaginal body stuffing, who was in police custody, developed mild seizures, altered mental status, tachycardia and hypertension shortly after admitting drugs ‘methamphetamine’ enclosed in plastic bags in her vagina. In the present study, two cases of body stuffers have been reported in which death has not occurred due to overdose of drug. In first case, the person who swallowed two packages of heroin drugs in an effort to conceal evidence during arrest, was died due to asphyxia as a result choking by one package at the level of carina. In second case, the prisoner who hid a package of buprenorphine drug inside his mouth in order to escape from inmates and police, was beaten by inmates to death. The packaging used in both cases was excellent.

In 2001 a new policy for dealing with drug traffickers was introduced in Hamburg, Germany. According to that if any person suspected of having swallowed drugs in order to hide the evidence should be taken to the Institute of Legal Medicine where the drugs will be recovered by

pharmacologically induced vomiting<sup>14</sup>. After that 683 drug packages seized from 154 body stuffers have been analyzed in Germany that mainly contained cocaine<sup>15</sup>.

## CONCLUSION:

The body stuffers are generally small scale traffickers who immediately swallow the illicit drug either wrapped or unwrapped in order to avoid arrest by police or custom officials. Doctors working in prisons and airports should be aware of the fact that how body stuffers or usual packers can be detected and managed. The drug packages concealed in body cavities can be detected by thorough abdominal, rectal or vaginal examination and aided by radiological investigation. The emetics can be used for the recovery of swallowed drug packages.

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