

## CASE SERIES

**Body Packer Syndrome - Ethical Issues? A Case Series****Chavhan H,<sup>1</sup> Chavan GS,<sup>2</sup> Murkey PN,<sup>3</sup> Batra AK,<sup>4</sup> Zopate PR,<sup>5</sup> Kukade S.<sup>6</sup>**Assistant Professor,<sup>1</sup> Professor,<sup>2,3</sup> Professor and Head,<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor,<sup>5</sup> Chemist.<sup>6</sup>

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**Abstract:**

Transporting the foreign bodies, goods, outside or inside the body is called body packer or body pusher or body stuffers and also mules. Contraband substances and specially gold are smuggled in this process. If suspected by Custom Agency or the Police, they refer the case for medical examination and further medico-legal process of recovery of these substances from human body. The role of the doctors is very crucial as far as the life of mules, amount of material to be recovered, preservation of the evidence material including documents, radiological evidence, x-rays and the procedural methods followed, till handing over the recovered material to the concerned officer and keeping records. In the present study, we discussed various cases of body packers which smuggled cocaine and gold. NCCT scan of abdomen is more effective technique to identify body packers. The work experience of such cases in tertiary care hospital is presented here with the aim to share with medical professionals and medico-legal experts.

**Keywords:** Body packer syndrome; Illicit drug smuggling; Gold smuggling; Role of doctors.**Introduction:**

Body packing refers to the concealment of prohibited substances in person's body.<sup>1,2</sup> "Body packers" usually ingest or insert wrapped packages of illicit drugs for the purpose of smuggling.<sup>3,4</sup> A swallower typically fills tiny balloon with small quantities of a drug. The balloon may be made with multilayered condoms, fingers of latex gloves, rubor balloons or more sophisticated hallow pellets.<sup>5,6</sup> These packets are usually tightly packed, tiny and tapered at machine-made forms as compared to genitally inserted packets which are smaller in size and relatively round in shape. Sometimes, Body Packer Syndrome causes death due to effect of rupture of heroin or cocaine packets in the gastrointestinal tract.<sup>7-9</sup> The drugs most often involved in body packing are heroin and cocaine.<sup>10-11</sup>

**Case report 1:** A 33 years old male was escorted by Airport Police to hospital due to suspicious behaviour at the airport after landing. He was suspected of body packing but without abdominal pain or vomiting. Plain abdominal X-ray was performed, the examination showed multiple, well-defined, oval shaped, radiopaque foreign bodies studded in colon. He was admitted under care of General Surgery as a case of drug carrier. NCCT abdomen was performed which showed multiple foreign bodies within colon and rectum. Patient was managed conservatively, total 35 capsules of cocaine were recovered from stool over period of 5 days, and capsules handed over to the

Customs Officer and a follow-up NCCT abdomen revealed none of the previously seen hyperdense objects in scan. At the time of discharge, suspect was doing well, mobilised with no active complaints.

**Case report 2:** A 43 years old male was caught in the airport for suspicion of possession of contraband substance in the form of body packing, with no complaints. He was brought in ED and admitted under care of General Surgery; patient after being apprehended passed 65 capsules of cocaine through defecation. He had ingested unknown number of capsules in Brazil. The contraband substance had size of a thumb, white in colour. Packed, sealed and handed over to Customs Officer. Since patient had no more capsules on NCCT abdomen and was asymptomatic, patient was discharged.

**Case report 3:** A 51 years old male was caught in the airport for suspicion of possession of contraband substance in the form of body packing, with no any complaints. He was brought in ED and admitted under care of General Surgery; patient after being apprehended passed 74 capsules of cocaine. He had ingested unknown number of capsules in Brazil. The contraband substance were weighed and found to be 177 gms. Packed, sealed and handed over to Customs Officer. Since patient had no more capsules on NCCT abdomen and was asymptomatic, patient was discharged.

**Case report 4:** A 37 years male was caught in the airport for possession of contraband substance in the form of body packing. Patient after being apprehended passed 38 capsules of cocaine at airport. He had ingested about 140 capsules of cocaine in Brazil. For this reason, patient brought to ED and admitted under care of General Surgery, CT abdomen plain was performed which showed multiple 30-40 foreign bodies present within colon and rectum. Patient was managed conservatively, 39 more capsules

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were recovered over period of 7 days, and capsules handed over to the Customs Officer and a follow-up NCCT abdomen revealed none of the previously seen hyperdense objects in scan. At the time of discharge, suspect was doing well, mobilised with no active complaints.

**Case report 5:** A 24 years old female was caught in airport for possession of contraband substance in the form of body packer. Brought in ED and X-rays was performed, X-rays showed 2 metallic exhibits inside vagina. Patient was then referred to OBGY, and on per speculum examination two rectangular exhibits wrapped with gauze piece were found. All two metallic exhibits packed and sealed, handed over to custom officers.

**Case report 6:** A 30 years old male brought by intelligence officer of airport. Regarding suspicion of carrying certain contraband substance, which the patient initially denied but agreed for the same later on. He passed 41 capsules at airport, the same capsules were chemically analysed by Narcotic Department and was found to be contain "Methaqualone". The patient was brought to ED for further screening and admitted under care of General Surgery. Patient passed 11 capsules on day admission. NCCT abdomen was performed which showed multiple (approximately 20cc) hyperdense foreign bodies of density around 171HU in ascending colon, sigmoid colon and rectum. Patient passed 110 capsules more over a period of 5 days admission, and capsules were handed over to the Customs Officer and a follow-up NCCT abdomen revealed none of the previously seen hyperdense objects in scan. At the time of discharge, suspect was doing well, mobilised with no active complaints.

#### Discussion:

From many decades, body packing is one of the common means of transporting illegal drugs across high security ports worldwide by drug smugglers. It has been observed that body packers were mostly young men, however there are evidence of adolescent males and pregnant women being used for the same. Heroin, cocaine and cannabis are the most commonly used drugs by body packers. For packaging of these drugs, body packers use waterproof multilayered latex sheath of balloons or condoms. Recently body packers swallow the cocaine and heroin in the form of capsules. NCCT scan of abdomen is more sensitive and accurate than abdominal X-ray to determine a body packer.<sup>12</sup>

Our cases also suggested that the drug swallowed by the body packers was cocaine by performing preliminary investigation. Plain abdominal X-ray and NCCT scan of abdomen revealed multiple capsule-like structures inside the bowel, and the capsules were confirmed to be cocaine using an onsite immunoassay drug-screening test. The various capsules of sedative drug i.e. methaqualone swallowed by 30 years male. In a case of female body packer, she hid two metallic exhibits (probably gold) inside vagina. Some of the body packers were asymptomatic. But they were under suspicion hence brought to the hospital by custom officer.

#### Conclusion:

By studying these case reports, it is concluded that clinical examination aided by radiological investigations are the fundamentals in diagnosing a body packer. Body packers

accepted that they smuggled heroin and cocaine for getting large amount of money. This method of illicit drug smuggling is very frequent across the world hence role of treating doctors and investigating officer is very important.

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