

MEDICOLEGAL ASPECTS OF MATERNAL DEATHS DUE TO PULMONARY THROMBOEMBOLISM

Vidanapathirana M¹, Gunethilake KMTB²

¹Senior Lecturer, Department of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

²Consultant Judicial Medical Officer, Teaching Hospital, Baticaloa, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

A state of hypercoagulability protects pregnant women from bleeding tendency which leads to pulmonary thromboembolism and results in medicolegal issues.

Case 01

32 year old pregnant female who developed weakness of legs, and was suspected to have Spinal Tuberculosis. Lower Segment Caesarian Section was performed and Heparin was started as she was immobile. Vertebral surgery was performed and anticoagulants were stopped. She died due to sudden onset difficulty of breathing. Allegations of medical negligence were raised by the relatives at the autopsy. The autopsy revealed bilateral Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism.

Case 02

A mother who presented with a first trimester abortion and pain in right leg died following sudden onset shortness of breath. She also had a history of a previous first trimester abortion. Autopsy revealed an embolus in the pulmonary artery with swollen and congested right leg without DVT.

CONCLUSIONS

Case 01

Regarding the allegations of medical negligence, the legal authorities will consider whether the discontinuation of

prophylactic anticoagulants before the 2nd surgery was a necessity and whether it was for the best interest of the patient.

Case 02

Immunological syndromes and inherited thrombophilia could be considered as underlying causes for multiple first trimester abortions and Deep Vein Thrombosis. The importance of performing the risk assessment of DVT when indicated is highlighted.

KEY WORDS:

Deep Vein Thrombosis, immunological syndromes, inherited thrombophilia,

INTRODUCTION

The two main embolic conditions that lead to maternal death are pulmonary thromboembolism and amniotic fluid embolism. Pulmonary thromboembolism occurs when a part of a thrombus, usually dislodged from a deep vein thrombus, passes into the pulmonary circulation, occluding the pulmonary arteries^[1]. It is a leading cause of maternal death as the risk of venous thrombosis is increased five-fold in pregnancy^[2].

The state of hypercoagulability which protects pregnant women from bleeding tendency may lead to pulmonary thromboembolism^[2] and result in medicolegal issues such as allegations of medical negligence and ascertainment of the cause of death.