

SUICIDE WITH DIGOXIN OVERDOSE: A CASE REPORT

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Digoxin is a cardiotonic glycoside that is primarily used in the treatment of heart failure, atrial fibrillation or flutter, and paroxysmal atrial tachycardia. Digoxin intoxication is not a common problem in clinical practice because it is therapeutically effective within a narrow dose range. Fatal effects are seldom reported. This paper presents a rare case of suicidal death due to an overdose of digoxin.

A 51-year-old general practitioner was admitted to the hospital unconscious and was pronounced dead immediately. It was revealed that the deceased had threatened to commit suicide during a heated family argument just one hour before admission to the hospital. Apparently, he had swallowed twenty, 0.25 mg, digoxin tablets that he had in his practice.

Medico legal autopsy findings showed congestion of brain, lungs, and kidneys and a partially digested rice meal in the stomach. Histological examination confirmed the macroscopic findings. Tablets of any form were not identified in the stomach. Myocardial and coronary artery diseases were excluded. Other organs were not affected. Samples of blood, liver and stomach contents were obtained for toxicological analysis by the Government Analyst. Accordingly, the report indicated that the samples of blood, liver and stomach contents contained digoxin at concentrations of $7\mu\text{g/ml}$, $1\mu\text{g/g}$ and $137\mu\text{g/g}$ respectively. Thus, the cause of death was confirmed as digoxin intoxication.

It appears that the deceased made use of his professional knowledge to choose a drug which is not usually used in cases of attempted suicide. Thus, the first ever case of suicide with digoxin poisoning is reported in Sri Lanka.

