

behaviour patterns that can occur in patients with eating disorders.

A behaviour involving abuse of medical equipment occurred in two of our patients with eating disorders who used a nasogastric tube and syringe to aspirate their stomach contents.

Case reports. Case A, a 22-year-old nurse with an eight-year history of bulimia nervosa fulfilling DSM – III – R criteria, had severe bulimia, bingeing and vomiting up to three times each day. She also had a history of abusing aspirin to induce gastritis, and to decrease her appetite. She went to the accident and emergency department, having swallowed a nasogastric tube, and an oesophagoscopy was performed to remove the tube. She had used the nasogastric tube to empty her stomach after meals and binges, as she considered it more effective than vomiting. (Six months later, she again swallowed the nasogastric tube and spigot which was removed by gastroscopy.)

Case B, a 20-year-old student of Indian origin, was admitted to the Eating Disorder Unit with a two-month history of self-starvation and weight loss to 36 kg (30% below standard body weight). The diagnosis was of abstaining anorexia nervosa. Initially she refused to eat and, after

other treatment options had failed and because of her deteriorating physical state, she was treated with nasogastric-tube feeding for four weeks. She was found to have been inserting a nasogastric tube and using a syringe to aspirate her stomach contents, thus controlling her food intake. She denied self-induced vomiting.

The abuse of a nasogastric tube is a behaviour that one should be aware can occur in patients with an eating disorder, particularly if they have medical or nursing experience, or in those patients who on rare occasions may require tube feeding as part of in-patient treatment.

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CORRIGENDUM

Journal, May 1992, 160, 671. The legend for Figure 2 should read "Number of panic attacks per hour".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Homicidal insanity

A wave, so to speak, of homicidal insanity has been passing over the North of England lately. At Middlesborough a lunatic shot a policeman, who was trying to secure him, through the heart; and at Durham, last week, a lunatic shot at two bank clerks with a revolver and wounded them – happily, it is hoped, not dangerously – and then shot himself

fatally. From some writing found upon the suicide it appears that he brooded over some supposed wrong, for he had an entry that "bank clerks and post-office clerks were all the same".

Reference

Lancet, 6 May 1893, 1098.

Researched by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Epsom, Surrey