



International Journal of Allied Medical Sciences and Clinical Research (IJAMSCR)

ISSN:2347-6567

IJAMSCR /Volume 4 | Issue 3 | July - Sep - 2016
www.ijamscr.com

Case report

Medical research

Firearm disguised as sharp injury – A case report

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ABSTRACT

Today's world is full of crime; new laws are made but still crime is not stopping. Police officers have to be vigilant in order to crack a crime and set an example so that criminals will fear to do the crime. For that, police should have good forensic knowledge, since it's an important tool to catch criminals and prosecute them for their crimes. But the truth is just the opposite - police personnel are careless & they do not possess sound forensic knowledge. They themselves destroy vital evidence knowingly or unknowingly thereby giving advantage to criminals by making such cases weak. We encountered such a case in which a dead body was found on a field under a tree. Police informed FSL team and made their primary opinion regarding apparent cause of death in this case as sharp injury caused by heavy sharp weapon. But when the body was examined in our institute during autopsy, not only doctors but police were also surprised to learn that the cause of death was firearm injury.

Keywords: Firearm, Bullet, Beveling, Decomposition, Sharp injury.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the General Hospital doctors believes on the police theory and don't do proper Postmortem examination. Their post-mortem reports also become biased and they lack proper forensic knowledge. On the other hand, a forensic person searches for the actual cause of death without getting influenced by police story. We

encountered such a case in which police story was proved false by postmortem examination finding.

CASE PRESENTATION

One day police gets information about an unknown dead body of a middle aged male individual lying on the field under the tree. The body was fresh. [Figure 1] On inspection, they thought that it's a case of murder and informed the FSL team. FSL team took photographs. Finally

they took the body to the General Hospital for postmortem. Since the body was of unknown individual, body was kept for identification purpose for 72hrs prior to postmortem without refrigeration. After 72 hrs they refer the body to our department with the remark “Body is in advanced stage of putrefaction”. In police papers, police mentioned the apparent cause of death as “assault by sharp weapon”. When body was received in our department along with police papers, postmortem was conducted and findings were noted which disclosed many facts about the dead individual.

EXTERNAL EXAMINATION

Body was decomposed. Body was emitting foul smell. Maggots crawling all over the places. [Figure 2] Scalp tissue missing at places over right frontal, left parieto-temporal region, left occipital, right parietal region. Facial features were not recognizable. Skin, soft tissue showed decomposition changes. No injury except head injury was appreciable over the body.

The injury overhead mentioned in police papers over left temporal region was seen and observed. Along with this, another wound was also observed over right temporal region. It was meticulously observed and beveling was noted. Interpretation

was made as firearm wound. After proper examination, a bullet was also recovered which confirmed our findings.

INJURY

An entry wound of firearm of irregular shape present over left side of head over left temporo-parietal area. Multiple radiating fractures were radiating from the defect. [Figure 3] The defect showed beveling on its inner table. All fractured ends and the defect showed blood infiltration at bony trabecule. Dura matter was putrefied. The brain matter was converted into dark colored pasty material with multiple bony pieces found inside the skull cavity.[Figure 5] The track of wound was going from left to right, slightly upward and backward direction making an exit wound from right side of skull and multiple bony pieces were driven out from exit wound. All the bony pieces showed blood infiltration in its trabecule. It was situated over right temporo-parietal region of skull. It showed beveling over outer table along with multiple bony pieces entangled in the scalp tissue. [1] Putrefied dura was also driven out from the exit wound. On further exploration, a metallic bullet was recovered from scalp tissues of right temporo-parietal region. [Figure 4] Cause of death was opined as firearm injury.



Figure 1: Dead body when it was recovered at crime scene.



Figure 2: When body was received in our mortuary after 72 hours.



Figure 3: Entry wound of firearm with radiating fractures.

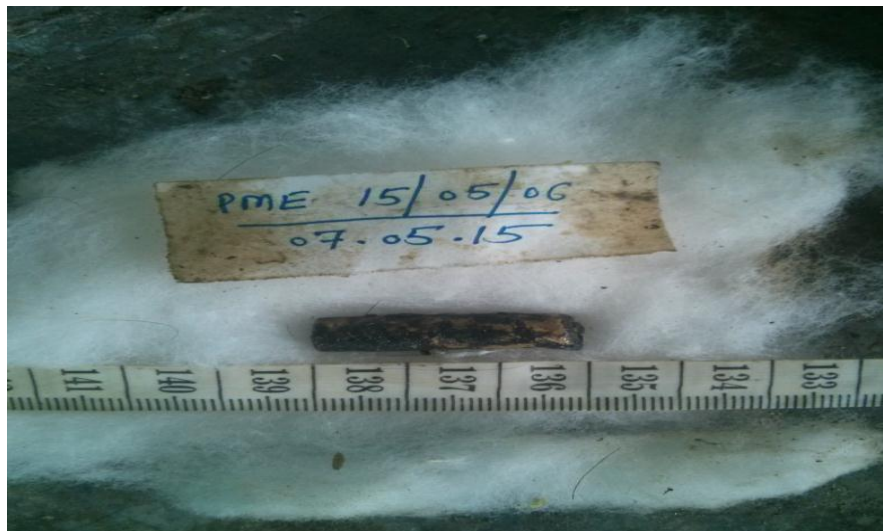
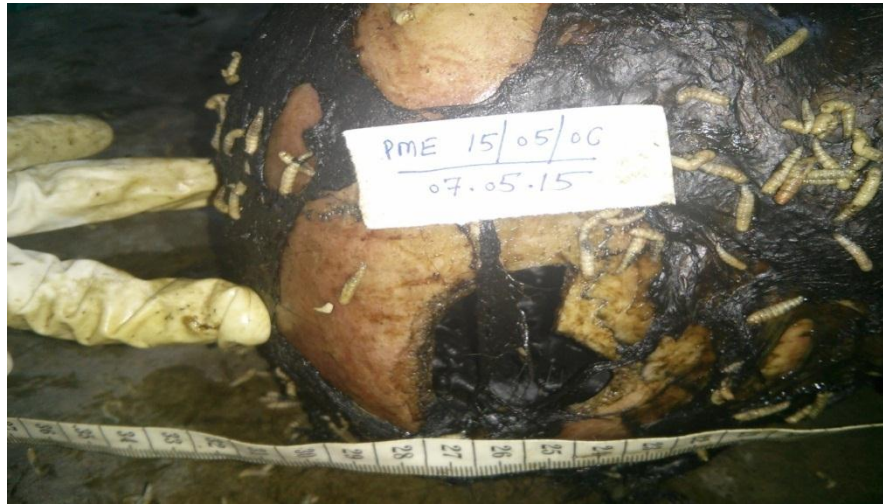


Figure 4: Exit wound of firearm along with the metallic bullet and bevelling on outer table.



Figure 5: After dissection of skull, the cranial cavity was filled with dark colored brain matter along with blood clot and bony fragments.

DISCUSSION

- Police officials should have sound knowledge of basic Forensic Science. As we know that police is the investigating agency and the first who reaches the crime scene.
- FSL crime scene team must visit the vicinity as early as possible so that valuable evidence should be collected and preserved appropriately. They should take photos and give their opinion then and there. In this case they may not have done their job since it's a case of Firearm. They should have looked for empty bullet shells and noted singeing, soiling & tattooing.
- Postmortem examination should be carried out first for unknown individuals and at least two identification points must be noted and then the body should be preserved for 72hrs; so that crucial evidence will not be destroyed. [2]

Real scenario like in this case

- Body was fresh at the time of recovery. But GH doctors and police deliberately caused delay in postmortem. They even didn't put the body in cold room and let the body to

decompose. GH doctors also do such kind of deeds to escape from PM and when body gets decomposed, they refer it to the forensic department with a tag line "*body in advance stage of decomposition*"; "*In lieu of justice*".

- FSL crime scene visit team doesn't give their report on time. [3] In India, mostly the doctor who is conducting postmortem is not going to the crime scene. Instead, Forensic science people are deployed by the Govt. to do crime scene visit. They do not even bother to give report on time. And this may cause failing its very purpose.
- In this case, Police came with a story of injury by sharp weapon; and I would not be surprised that FSL team also thought the same.

CONCLUSION

Anybody can hear the truth from a living person but only few people are specialized to understand what a dead person wants.

Take home message

1. Do proper crime scene visit.

2. Crime Scene Visit Report should be prepared and handed over to the police then and there.[3]
3. Do not delay the postmortem; otherwise crucial evidence could be lost.

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How to cite this article: Jai Prakash Soni, Dinesh Chhillar, Kunal Khanna, Vinod Kumar, Vincent Merry, S. K. Dhatarwal. Firearm disguised as sharp injury – A case report. Int J of Allied Med Sci and Clin Res 2016; 4(3): 455-460.

Source of Support: Nil. **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.