Alveolar Hemorrhage Following Tirofiban Treatment. A Misleading Diagnosis

To the Editor,

We read with great interest the recent case report by Agnelli et al related with alveolar hemorrhage following tirofiban treatment.¹ Although large clinical trials have demonstrated the clinical effectiveness of therapy with glycoprotein IIb-IIIa inhibitors in patients with ischemic heart disease,² combination therapy with aspirin, clopidogrel, and heparin can be associated with bleeding complications.³ Although major and minor bleeding complications are the most frequent adverse events associated with the use of glycoprotein IIb-IIIa inhibitors,⁴ alveolar hemorrhage, as a potentially fatal complication, is often under-recognized. On the basis of the low number of cases reported in the literature, we can conclude that clinical suspicion is required to diagnose this life-threatening complication. The number of patients in whom alveolar hemorrhage might have been misdiagnosed is unknown.⁵ Clinical findings in addition to a sudden fall in hemoglobin with hemoptysis following administration of glycoprotein IIb-IIIa inhibitors should alert physicians to the likelihood of this severe complication. In the literature, Ali et al⁶ were the first to report a case of pulmonary hemorrhage following tirofiban use and the second case was reported by Yılmaz et al.⁷ Although in previous studies,⁸ no association was clearly defined between the presence of underlying lung disease and the development of alveolar hemorrhage, Yılmaz
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et al. reported that their patient had elevated pulmonary capillary wedge pressure at the time of catheterization. In addition, Sitges et al. reported a case of pulmonary hemorrhage following abciximab use who had radiographic evidence of pulmonary congestion before administration. This probable correlation was also supported by Khanlou et al., who reported 6 patients with pulmonary hemorrhage following abciximab use, 5 of whom had elevated pulmonary capillary wedge pressures. Although the small number precluded any definitive comments, pulmonary congestion or elevated pressures in the pulmonary bed in patients who receive glycoprotein IIb-IIIa inhibitors may predispose patients to alveolar hemorrhage. Since, the radiographic features of diffuse alveolar hemorrhage strikingly resemble cardiogenic pulmonary congestion, we think that before administration of these agents, a radiographic examination may help us to differentiate the high risk group for this life-threatening complication.

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REFERENCES