Accidental golf club injuries

Alan G. Pennycook, William G. Morrison and David A.W. Ritchie

Department of Accident and Emergency Medicine, Royal Infirmary, 84 Castle Street, Glasgow G4 0SF, UK

Summary: Over a 2 month period, 33 patients with injuries caused by golf clubs were identified among attenders at the accident and emergency department at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The vast majority of these were to the face and head, including three compound skull fractures. Attention is drawn to the average age of those injured (8.1 years) and to the fact that only one of the injuries occurred on a golf course. The dangers of unsupervised experimentation with golf clubs by young children are emphasized.

Introduction

Sport is a significant cause of head injury necessitating attendance at the accident and emergency (A&E) department, forming some 11% of such injuries in Scotland.¹ Golf, along with horse riding and association football, are the sports most commonly linked with serious head injury.²

The last few years have been particularly successful for European golfers and this has been associated with an increased media coverage of the sport. There has been a parallel increase in the number of participants who wish to play the sport but have no easy access to proper facilities. This applies particularly to a younger age group who may therefore be at greater risk of injury while experimenting with golf clubs in an unsupervised or reckless manner.

A prospective study was initiated in the A&E department at Glasgow Royal Infirmary to assess whether such a risk existed and, if so, the extent of the problem.

Methods

Over the 2 month period of July and August 1989 a record was kept of all patients presenting to the A&E department suffering from an injury caused by a golf club. Particular attention was paid to the age of the patient, the nature and site of the injury and where the incident had occurred.

Results

During the period of the study, 33 patients were identified who had been injured by golf clubs. All these injuries had been sustained accidentally

whilst simply observing another's golf swing.

The average age of those injured in this series was 8.1 years. Only one of the injuries occurred on a golf course. The vast majority (24, 72.7%) of injuries were to the forehead and face, consisting mainly (27) of simple lacerations. However, three patients presented with compound skull fractures, necessitating admission for observation, prophylactic antibiotics and in the case of a child with a depressed frontal bone fracture, neurosurgical assessment. All patients made a full and uncomplicated recovery.

Discussion

During sporting activities it is usually the direct participants who are injured whilst playing or training. However, this series highlights a group who are at risk while simply observing or experimenting with the use of golf clubs, often unsupervised.

Injury by a golf club or ball is well recognized to be a cause of head injury in sport, proving to be the largest group requiring referral to the regional neurosurgical unit in Glasgow over a 5-year period, with 27% of the series.² However, this prior survey specifically excluded children at play, concentrating on those injured during athletic or competitive recreational activities.

In contrast, this series highlights that the vast majority of golf club related injuries occurred away from a recognized golf course or putting green, in a street or local park. Significantly, the strikingly low average age of the injured (8.1 years) confirms the earlier finding of Lindsay *et al.*² that children are mainly at risk (mean age 10 years). Therefore, the low age group of those injured combined with the fact that only one of the injuries occurred on a golf course, strongly suggests that these children are

injured whilst experimenting with golf clubs while there is inadequate or non-existent supervision.

The authors feel that this series demonstrates the seriousness of the possible injuries, from cosmetically significant facial scars to the more serious skull fractures and well recognized potential com-

plications.³ A greater public awareness of the risks of inappropriate and unsupervised experimentation with golf clubs is required, and their use in an inappropriate setting such as a street or public part actively discouraged.

References

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