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A Different Type of Tennis Elbow: Spontaneous Septic Arthritis of the Elbow in a Previously Healthy 40-Year-Old Male

Case of a 40-year-old male patient with no past medical history presenting to the emergency department for evaluation of left elbow pain for about 1 week. He could not recall an inciting event or injury but attributed his pain to increased participation in tennis activities during the previous months. He had been evaluated 3 days prior at another facility where x-rays and lab work were performed which he stated were within normal limits. He was discharged with a working diagnosis of tennis elbow and was instructed to take NSAIDs. However, his pain worsened which prompted this visit to the ED. He described his pain worsened with elbow extension and carrying objects. Upon physical examination, the left elbow was held in flexion and had marked swelling as compared to the other side. He also had warmth and tenderness to palpation diffusely over the elbow. Range of motion was severely limited and was painful in all planes. Bedside ultrasound showed a large intraarticular effusion and lab work was relevant for mild leukocytosis. The elbow joint was aspirated and 10mL of grossly purulent material was obtained. He later underwent surgical washout of the elbow with synovectomy followed by a prolonged course of antibiotics. He went on to make a complete recovery and 6 months after the event, he was able to participate in all tennis activities.

Keywords

septic, arthritis, elbow, pain, joint, effusion

Biography

Graduated from the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine, in 2020. She completed her Emergency Medicine specialty at St. Luke's Medical Center in Ponce, PR, from which she graduated in 2024. She was then accepted into a Sports Medicine program at West Virginia University, graduating in 2025. She returned to Puerto Rico with the intention of developing a combined Emergency and Sports Medicine practice, and to expand access to patients in PR to the services of a physician specialized in this field. She currently works as a faculty member in the residency program from which she graduated.