

Unexpected late pregnancy

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Description

A 34-year-old woman presented at emergency department complaining of a month of generalised abdominal pain and bloating and not opening bowel for the previous 6 days. Apart from obesity (BMI 35.2) and years of chronic constipation no other co-morbidity was reported. Flatus was passing normally. She did not have any nausea or vomiting. No significant weight change was noticed.

Vital signs were within normal range. Lactate level was 1.0. Hard stools were found during rectal digital exploration. The abdomen was soft and non tender but a large area of rigidity was palpated centrally, reaching the epigastrium. Thus, an abdominal plain film was requested.

Astonishingly, a foetal skeleton was observed at the x-ray, evidence of late pregnancy. The mother was immediately informed of the unforeseen finding and of the inadvertent radiation dose given to the baby. In particular, it was specified that the risk of harm would be minimal considering both low x-ray dose and late stage pregnancy.

The patient had declared she was not pregnant and had consented for x-ray. Already mother of three, she did not have any period for the previous two years and was totally unaware of this pregnancy. Gynaecologists were contacted to organize further assessment and follow-up. Her constipation resolved with an enema and regular laxatives were prescribed to continue.

Her gestation was incidentally discovered at 34 weeks. She delivered spontaneously 6 weeks later with no complications.



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