

Resurrecting reserved only for Jesus the son of god? Autoresuscitation: the Lazarus syndrome/ phenomenon

¿Resucitar reservado solo para Jesús el hijo de Dios?
Autoresuscitación: el síndrome / fenómeno de Lázaro

The resurrection of Jesus, or anastasis is the Christian belief that God raised Jesus after his crucifixion as first of the dead, starting his exalted life as Christ and Lord. The resurrection amounts to the Father's clear signal that Jesus is the powerful Son of God who has conquered death and reigns as Lord of all (Romans 1:4; 4:25). The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus' "blood of the new covenant" saves His people from their sins.

Lazarus syndrome, (the Lazarus heart) also known as autoresuscitation after failed cardiopulmonary resuscitation, is the spontaneous return of a normal cardiac rhythm after failed attempts at resuscitation. Its occurrence has been noted in medical literature at least 39 times since 1982.



La resurrección de Jesús, o anastasis, es la creencia cristiana de que Dios levantó a Jesús después de su crucifixión como el primero de los muertos, comenzando su vida exaltada como Cristo y Señor. La resurrección equivale a la clara señal del Padre de que Jesús es el poderoso Hijo de Dios que ha conquistado la muerte y reina como Señor de todos (Romanos 1:4; 4:25). La resurrección demuestra que la "sangre del nuevo pacto" de Jesús salva a su pueblo de sus pecados.

El síndrome de Lázaro (el corazón de Lázaro), también conocido como autoresuscitación después de una reanimación cardiopulmonar fallida, es el retorno espontáneo de un ritmo cardíaco normal después de intentos fallidos de reanimación. Su aparición se ha observado en la literatura médica al menos 39 veces desde 1982.

Background

Third-degree atrioventricular (AV) block can result in sudden cardiac death if no reliable escape rhythm is present. Here, we report a case of an 86-year-old female patient who developed a third-degree AV block leading to cardiac arrest. Surprisingly, sinus rhythm returned after 4 min of asystole, and she showed complete neurological recovery.

Case Summary

Emergency services were contacted by the husband of an 86-year-old woman after she was found unconscious. Ambulance personnel diagnosed a third-degree AV block without an escape rhythm and transcutaneous pacing was started. At arrival on the emergency ward, pacing was inadequate, resulting in absence of circulation for 10 min. After consultation with the family, the patient turned out to have signed a 'do not resuscitate' order. Given the impression that the considerable delay deemed favorable neurological recovery unlikely, it was decided together with the family to stop the resuscitation. Subsequently, she had an intermittent junctional escape rhythm but eventually developed a documented asystole of more than 4 min. Against all expectations, she regained sinus rhythm and fully recovered. Eventually, a pacemaker was implanted and she was discharged home without neurological sequelae of the cardiac arrest.

Discussion

Autoresuscitation, also known as the Lazarus syndrome, is the spontaneous return of circulation after cardiac arrest and is incidentally seen after failed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Autoresuscitation in the absence of CPR is highly unusual, but could, in this case, be due to the total AV block as the cause of the cardiac arrest.

Antecedentes

El bloqueo auriculoventricular (AV) de tercer grado puede provocar una muerte cardíaca súbita si no hay un ritmo de escape confiable. Aquí, informamos un caso de una paciente de 86 años que desarrolló un bloqueo AV de tercer grado que condujo a un paro cardíaco. Sorprendentemente, el ritmo sinusal regresó después de 4 minutos de asistolia y mostró una recuperación neurológica completa.

Resumen del caso

El esposo de una mujer de 86 años contactó a los servicios de emergencia después de que la encontraron inconsciente. El personal de ambulancias diagnosticó un bloqueo AV de tercer grado sin ritmo de escape y se inició estimulación transcutánea. Al llegar a la sala de emergencias, la estimulación fue inadecuada, lo que resultó en ausencia de circulación durante 10 minutos. Después de consultar con la familia, el paciente resultó haber firmado una orden de "no resucitar". Dada la impresión de que el retraso considerable consideraba improbable la recuperación neurológica favorable, se decidió junto con la familia detener la reanimación. Posteriormente, tuvo un ritmo intermitente de escape de la unión, pero finalmente desarrolló una asistolia documentada de más de 4 min. Contra todas las expectativas, recuperó el ritmo sinusal y se recuperó por completo. Finalmente, se implantó un marcapasos y fue dada de alta a su hogar sin las secuelas neurológicas del paro cardíaco.

Discusión

La autoresuscitación, también conocida como síndrome de Lázaro, es el retorno espontáneo de la circulación después de un paro cardíaco y se observa incidentalmente después de una reanimación cardiopulmonar (RCP) fallida. La autoresuscitación en ausencia de RCP es muy inusual, pero podría, en este caso, ser debido al bloqueo AV total como la causa del paro cardíaco.

Learning points

- Autoresuscitation, also known as the Lazarus syndrome, is a rare medical phenomenon of spontaneous return of circulation after cardiac arrest.
- In the case of atrioventricular block resulting in asystole and cardiac arrest, electrical activity can reappear, even after a long period of asystole.
- In those cases, one should be cautious of diagnosing death prematurely.

Introduction

Third-degree atrioventricular (AV) block, also known as complete heart block, is the most severe conduction disease of the heart and can lead to sudden cardiac death if no reliable escape rhythm is present. Here, we describe a case of complete heart block without escape rhythm, resulting in prolonged cardiac arrest. Against all odds, the patient made a full neurological recovery.

Timeline

22:30	Complete heart block, start of transcutaneous pacing by ambulance personnel
23:20	23:20 Presentation at emergency department, significant delay until adequate pacing
23:40	Because of poor prognosis, decided to stop pacing
0:00–2:00	Intermittent agonal heart rhythm, <20/min and complete atrioventricular (AV) block with junctional escape rhythm of 40/min. Start of palliative sedation
2:07–2:11	Total AV block without escape rhythm resulting in asystole of 4 min
04:00	Regained consciousness, midazolam infusion stopped
06:30	Fully awake, maximal Glasgow coma scale, no neurological sequelae of cardiac arrest
Day 2	Dual-chamber pacemaker implantation
Day 3	Discharged home

Puntos de aprendizaje

- La auto resucitación, también conocida como síndrome de Lázaro, es un fenómeno médico poco frecuente de retorno espontáneo de la circulación después de un paro cardíaco.
- En el caso de bloqueo auriculoventricular que resulta en asistolia y paro cardíaco, la actividad eléctrica puede reaparecer, incluso después de un largo período de asistolia.
- En esos casos, se debe tener cuidado para no diagnosticar la muerte prematuramente.

Introducción

El bloqueo AV de tercer grado, o bloqueo cardíaco completo, es el grado de trastorno de conducción más grave del corazón por su potencial de conducir a una muerte cardíaca súbita si no hay un ritmo de escape confiable. Describimos un caso de bloqueo cardíaco completo sin ritmo de escape, que resultó en un paro cardíaco prolongado. Contra todo pronóstico, el paciente tuvo una recuperación neurológica completa

Cronología de los hechos

22:30	Bloqueo AV completo, inicio de estimulación transcutánea por el personal de ambulancia
23:20	23:20 Presentación en la sala de emergencia, con retraso significativo hasta un ritmo adecuado
23:40	Debido al mal pronóstico, se decidió parar el marcapaseo
0:00–2:00	Ritmo cardíaco agónico intermitente, <20 / min y bloqueo AV completo con ritmo de escape de la unión de 40 / min. Inicio de la sedación paliativa.
2:07–2:11	Total AV block without escape rhythm resulting in asystole of 4 min
04:00	Conciencia recuperada, la infusión de midazolam se detuvo
06:30	Completamente despierta, escala máxima de coma de Glasgow, sin secuelas neurológicas de paro cardíaco.
Dia 2	Implantación de marcapasos de doble cámara
Dia 3	Alta para casa

Case presentation

An 86-year-old woman was brought to the emergency department after she was found unresponsive by her husband. She was known with insulin-dependent type II diabetes mellitus and an anaplastic oligodendrogloma with epileptic seizures, diagnosed 1 year ago, for which she was started on levetiracetam and recently received radiotherapy. The first cardiac rhythm recorded by the ambulance personnel was third-degree AV block in absence of an escape rhythm. Transcutaneous pacing with an external defibrillator was started, which resulted in return of circulation with a systolic blood pressure of around 90 mmHg. Upon arrival in the hospital, however, she was accidentally disconnected from the external pacemaker, which went unnoticed until she was connected to the electrocardiogram (ECG) monitor. At that moment, the patient had complete heart block with no escape rhythm, an agonal breathing, and was peripherally cold. A second attempt of transcutaneous pacing was made, which at first had non-capture, but after increasing the output of the pacemaker, circulation was restored. A point-of-care arterial blood gas revealed a pH of 7.22, a pCO₂ of 40 mmHg, a pO₂ of 136 mmHg, a bicarbonate of 16.2 mmol/L, and a base excess of -12 mmol/L. The lactate level was 11.7 mmol/L. It then became known from the medical record that the patient had previously signed a 'do not resuscitate' (DNR) order. However, her wishes concerning intubation and mechanical ventilation were not further specified. Yet, due to the high amperage of the transcutaneous pacing, she was in acute distress, demanding sedation and intubation if transcutaneous pacing was to be continued. The dilemma regarding intubation and mechanical ventilation was discussed with the family. Her husband made clear that she would not have wanted to be kept alive by mechanical support if there was no chance for a meaningful recovery. Due to the combination of a malignant brain tumour and prolonged cerebral hypoxia caused by substantial delay in adequate pacing (out-of-hospital before ambulance arrival ~10 min, in-hospital ~5 min), we considered the chances of neurological recovery highly unlikely. Therefore, in agreement with the family, it was decided to stop the transcutaneous pacing, after which an agonal heart rhythm of <20 b.p.m. was seen. The family was then given some time alone with the patient.

during her (presumed) final moments.

. However, when the patient was reassessed 20 min later, she was breathing spontaneously, had a faint pulse and had regained a junctional escape rhythm of 50 b.p.m. Considering the poor prognosis, we decided together with the family, to admit her to the ward for palliative sedation to limit physical distress.

In the next hour, intermittent sinus bradycardia and total AV block with a nodal escape rhythm were seen. However, 1 h later, heart rate slowed down, resulting in complete heart block and asystole, which lasted for ~4 min (Figure 1). Again, an escape rhythm of around 40 b.p.m. reappeared

Presentación del caso

Una mujer de 86 años fue llevada al departamento de emergencias después de que su esposo la encontró desmayada. Era conocida ser portadora de diabetes tipo II dependiente de insulina y un oligodendrogioma anaplásico con convulsiones epilépticas, diagnosticada hace 1 año, por lo que comenzó con levetiracetam y recientemente recibió radioterapia. El primer ritmo cardíaco registrado por el personal de la ambulancia fue el bloqueo AV completo en ausencia de un ritmo de escape. Se inició estimulación transcutánea con un desfibrilador externo, lo que resultó en el retorno de la circulación con una presión arterial sistólica de alrededor de 90 mmHg. Sin embargo, al llegar al hospital, se desconectó accidentalmente del marcapasos externo, que pasó desapercibido hasta que se conectó al monitor de ECG. En ese momento, el paciente tenía un bloqueo cardíaco completo sin ritmo de escape, una respiración agonica y con extremidades frías. Se realizó un segundo intento de estimulación transcutánea, que al principio no tenía captura, pero después de aumentar la salida del marcapasos, se restableció la circulación. La gasometría de sangre arterial reveló un pH de 7.22, un pCO₂ de 40 mmHg, un pO₂ de 136 mmHg, un bicarbonato de 16.2 mmol / L y un exceso de base de -12 mmol / L. El nivel de lactato fue de 11.7 mmol / L. Luego se supo por el registro médico que el paciente había firmado previamente una orden de "no resucitar" (DNR). Sin embargo, sus deseos con respecto a la intubación y la ventilación mecánica no se especificaron más. Sin embargo, debido al alto amperaje de la estimulación transcutánea, estaba en angustia aguda, exigiendo sedación e intubación si la estimulación transcutánea iba a continuar. El dilema con respecto a la intubación y la ventilación mecánica se discutió con la familia. Su esposo dejó claro que ella no hubiera querido que la mantuvieran viva con ayuda mecánica si no hubiera posibilidad de una recuperación significativa. Debido a la combinación de un tumor cerebral maligno y la hipoxia cerebral prolongada causada por un retraso sustancial en la estimulación adecuada (fuera del hospital antes de la llegada de la ambulancia ~10 min, en el hospital ~5 min), consideramos que las posibilidades de recuperación neurológica eran muy poco probables . Por lo tanto, de acuerdo con la familia, se decidió detener la

estimulación transcutánea, después de lo cual un ritmo cardíaco agonal de <20 b.p.m. fue visto. A la familia se le dio un tiempo a solas con el paciente, durante sus (presuntos) momentos finales. Sin embargo, cuando la paciente fue reevaluada 20 minutos después, estaba respirando espontáneamente, tenía un pulso débil y había recuperado un ritmo de escape de la unión de 50 b.p.m. Teniendo en cuenta el mal pronóstico, decidimos, junto con la familia, admitirla en la sala de sedación paliativa para limitar la angustia física.

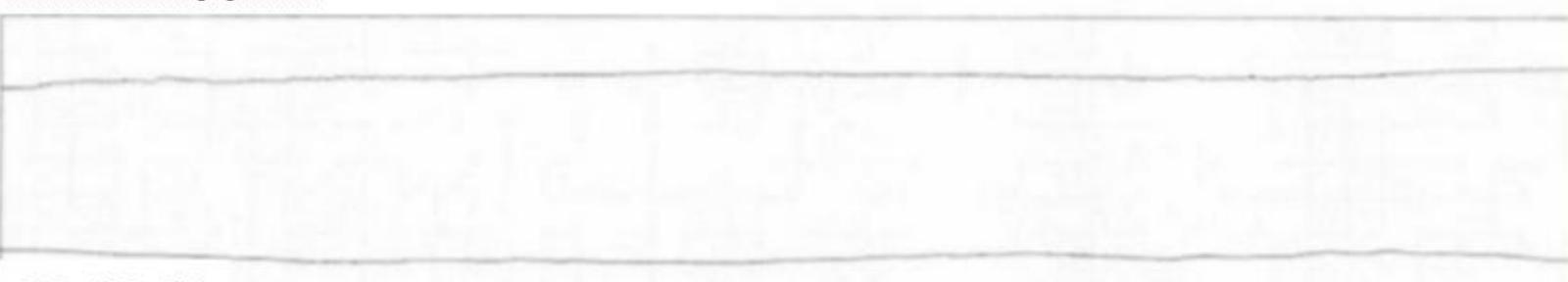
En la siguiente hora, se observaron bradicardia sinusal intermitente y bloqueo AV total con un ritmo de escape nodal. Sin embargo, 1 h más tarde, la frecuencia cardíaca disminuyó, lo que resultó en un bloqueo cardíaco completo y asistolia, que duró ~4 min (Figura 1). De nuevo, un ritmo de escape de alrededor de 40 b.p.m. reaparecido

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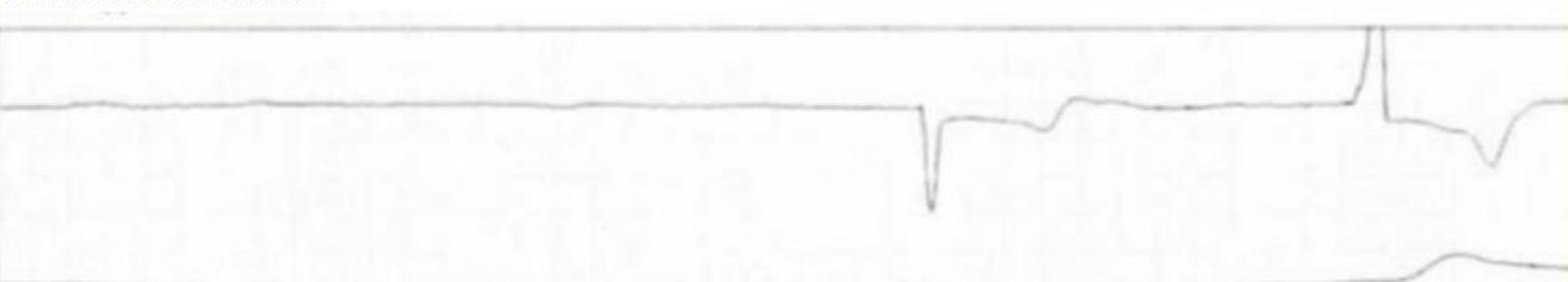
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02:11:00

Figure 1 Three snapshots from the telemetry between 2:07 and 2:10. (Above) At 2:07:13 sinus rhythm with 2:1 block evolves into a complete AV block without escape rhythm and subsequently asystole. (Middle) Between 2:07 and 2:10 complete asystole is seen. (Below) At 2:10:44, a PVC occurs, after which a ventricular escape rhythm returns.

Figura 1 Tres instantáneas de la telemetría entre 2:07 y 2:10. (Arriba) A las 2:07:13, el ritmo sinusal con bloqueo 2: 1 evoluciona hacia un bloqueo AV completo sin ritmo de escape y, posteriormente, asistolia. (Medio) Entre 2:07 y 2:10 se ve completa asistolia. (Abajo) A las 2:10:44, se produce un complejo ventricular prematuro, después del cual regresa un ritmo de escape ventricular

Strookrapport

Another 2 h later, the family informed the medical staff that the patient had regained consciousness, despite continuous sedation with infusion of midazolam of 1.5 mg/h. When we reassessed her, she opened her eyes spontaneously and could obey simple commands. She had a heart rate of 40 b.p.m., a blood pressure of 130/60 mmHg, a temperature of 36.7°C, and an oxygen saturation of 95% at room air. The ECG showed a third-degree AV block with a ventricular escape rhythm of 40/min with a left bundle branch block morphology ([Figure 2](#)). The midazolam infusion was stopped. One hour later, the patient was fully awake and had a maximal score on the Glasgow coma scale. In the following hours and days, no neurological sequelae of the prolonged cardiac arrest were seen. Furthermore, AV conduction recovered completely ([Figure 3](#)). Two days after the event, a permanent dual-chamber pacemaker was implanted and the patient was discharged home.

Otras 2 h más tarde, la familia informó al personal médico que el paciente había recuperado la conciencia, a pesar de la sedación continua con infusión de midazolam de 1,5 mg / h. Cuando reevaluamos, abrió los ojos espontáneamente y pudo obedecer órdenes simples. Tenía una FCde 40 b.p.m., una PA de 130/60 mmHg, una temperatura de 36.7 ° C y una saturación de oxígeno del 95% en el aire ambiente. El ECG mostró un bloqueo AV de tercer grado con un ritmo de escape ventricular de 40 /b.p.m con una morfología de BRI (Figura 2). La infusión de midazolam se detuvo. Una hora después, el paciente estaba completamente despierto y tenía una puntuación máxima en la escala de coma de Glasgow. En las siguientes horas y días, no se observaron secuelas neurológicas del paro cardíaco prolongado. Además, la conducción AV se recuperó por completo (Figura 3). Dos días después del evento, se implantó un marcapasos permanente de doble cámara y el paciente fue dado de alta.

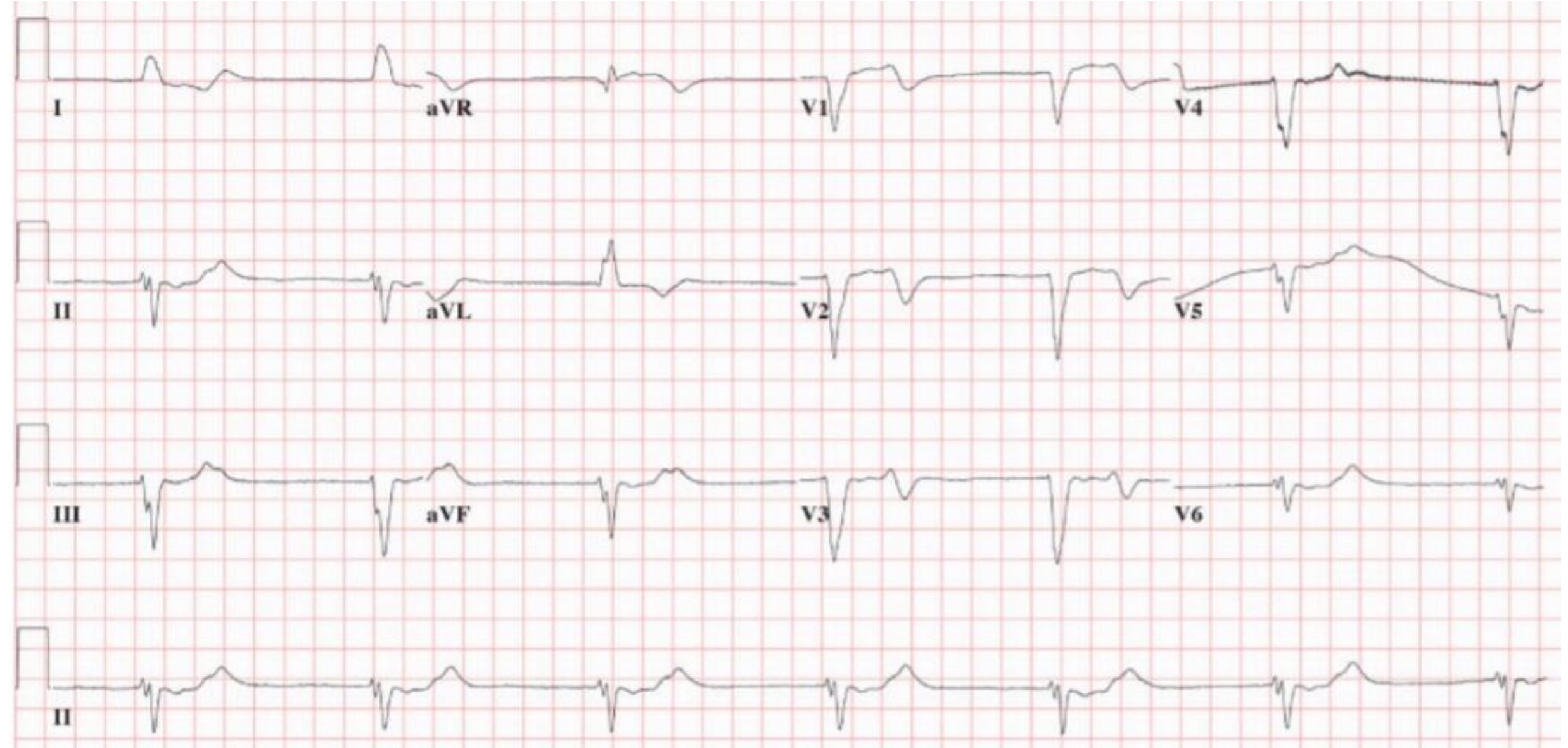


Figure 2 Complete atrioventricular block with a ventricular escape rhythm of 40 b.p.m. and extrem leftward axis the ventricular escaper rhythm has left bundle branch block morphology and plus-minus T waves on right precordial leads V1–3. **Figura 2 Bloqueo AV completo con un ritmo de escape ventricular de 40 b.p.m. y el eje del QRS con extremo desvío a la izquierda, ritmo de escape ventricular con morfología del bloqueo de la rama izquierda y las ondas T bifásicas más-menos en las derivaciones precordiales derechas V1-3.**

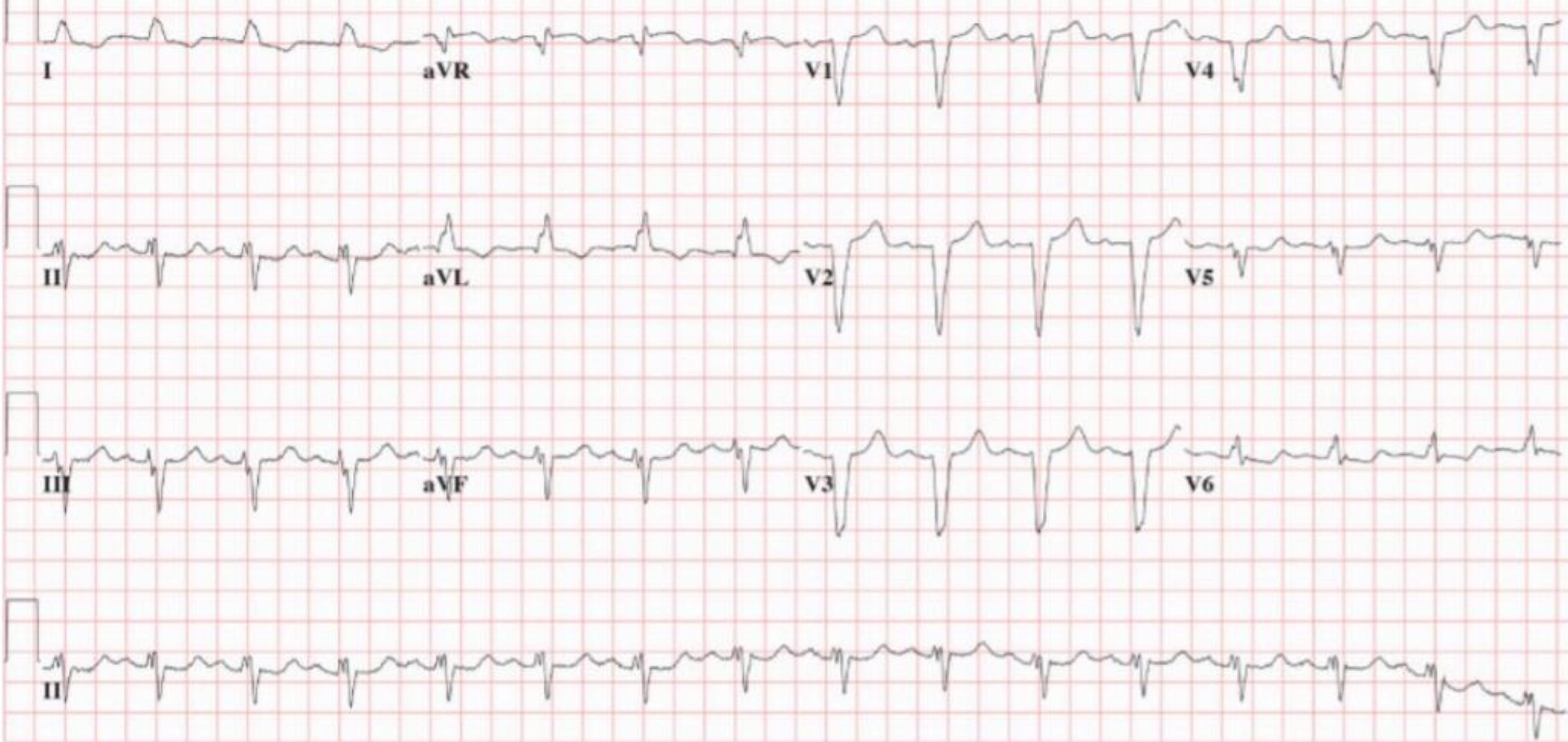


Figure 3 Sinus rhythm, 100/min, leftward axis, fractioned QRS first-degree atrioventricular block, and pseudo left bundle branch block.

Figura 3 Ritmo sinusal, FC100 / min, bloqueo auriculoventricular de primer grado eje hacia la izquierda, QRS fraccionado y bloqueo de rama de rama izquierda atípico..

Discussion

We report a case of full neurological recovery after autoresuscitation from complete heart block without escape rhythm, resulting in a documented asystole of at least 4 min. Autoresuscitation or the spontaneous return of circulation after cardiac arrest is referred to as the 'Lazarus phenomenon', named after the biblical figure Lazarus of Bethany, who was resurrected by Jesus Christ 4 days after his death.¹ While autoresuscitation is rare medical phenomenon, increasingly more cases have been reported in recent years.² In most cases, autoresuscitation is seen after failed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The current literature on this phenomenon is primarily anecdotal with only two observational studies published so far. Sheth et al.³ studied if the 2-min observation period after asystole is sufficient to declare death in patients that underwent organ donation. Of 73 patients included, no cases of autoresuscitation were seen after 2 min of asystole. In another study of 41 intensive care unit patients for whom was decided to withdraw life-sustaining therapy, Dhanani et al.⁴ found that circulation does not resume after 89 s of its absence. Therefore, in the presented case, the recovery of cardiac activity after 4 min of asystole in the absence of CPR is highly exceptional. While the underlying mechanism remains unknown, some theories exist, which all involve the delayed effects of interventions during CPR. Rapid mechanical ventilation can result in hyperinflation of the lungs and positive end-expiratory pressure, causing a reduction in venous return and reduced cardiac output.⁵ Furthermore, because of the impaired venous return, drugs (e.g. adrenaline) administered during CPR are poorly delivered centrally. After cessation of CPR, venous return is improved, causing a delayed effect of the adrenaline.⁶ However, in our case, because of the DNR, no chemical resuscitation with adrenaline was performed. Nonetheless, the specific cause of cardiac arrest in this case, i.e. third-degree AV block, can be intermittent, probably due to alterations in vagal tone in combination with underlying degenerative conduction disease. This may be the cause of the recurrence of an escape rhythm after the prolonged asystole. In general, prognosis after autoresuscitation is poor. A systematic review of Ballesteros-Peña et al.⁷ found that 64% of all patients died prior to discharge. Even if the patient survives, the risk of

neurological impairment is considerable. Therefore, the perfect neurological recovery in our case is puzzling. Ischaemic preconditioning of the brain due to intermittent cerebral perfusion is an interesting hypothesis. Similar to preconditioning of the heart, exposing the brain to short periods of ischaemia–reperfusion can protect against the debilitating effects of prolonged ischaemia.⁸ Thus, the intermittent recurrence of cardiac output may have saved her from substantial brain damage due to the 4-min asystole. As Lazarus was resurrected 4 days after his death, we presented a patient who recovered completely after 4 minutes of asystole.

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Discusión

Reportamos un caso de recuperación neurológica completa después de la autoresuscitación del bloqueo AV completo sin ritmo de escape, lo que resultó en una asistolia documentada de al menos 4 min. La autoresuscitación o el retorno espontáneo de la circulación después de un paro cardíaco se conoce como el 'fenómeno de Lázaro', llamado así por la figura bíblica Lázaro de Betania, quien resucitó por Jesucristo 4 días después de su muerte.¹ Mientras que la autoresuscitación es un fenómeno médico raro, cada vez más se han reportado más casos en los últimos años². En la mayoría de los casos, la reanimación automática se observa después de una reanimación cardiopulmonar (RCP) fallida. La literatura actual sobre este fenómeno es principalmente anecdótica con solo dos estudios observacionales publicados hasta ahora. Sheth et al.³ estudiaron si el período de observación de 2 minutos después de la asistolia es suficiente para declarar la muerte en pacientes sometidos a donación de órganos. De 73 pacientes incluidos, no se observaron casos de autoresuscitación después de 2 minutos de asistolia. En otro estudio de 41 pacientes de la unidad de cuidados intensivos para quienes se decidió retirar la terapia de soporte vital, Dhanani et al.⁴ encontraron que la circulación no se reanuda después de 89 s de su ausencia. Por lo tanto, en el caso presentado, la recuperación de la actividad cardíaca después de 4 minutos de asistolia en ausencia de RCP es muy excepcional. Si bien el mecanismo subyacente sigue siendo desconocido, existen algunas teorías, que implican los efectos retardados de las intervenciones durante la RCP. La ventilación mecánica rápida puede provocar hiperinflación de los pulmones y presión positiva al final de la inspiración, lo que provoca una reducción del retorno venoso y un gasto cardíaco reducido.⁵ Además, debido al deterioro del retorno venoso, los medicamentos (por ejemplo, adrenalina) administrados durante la RCP se administran de manera deficiente en el centro . Después del cese de la RCP, se mejora el retorno venoso, lo que provoca un efecto retardado de la adrenalina.⁶ Sin embargo, en nuestro caso, debido a la DNR, no se realizó reanimación química con adrenalina. No obstante, la causa específica del paro cardíaco en este caso, es decir, el bloqueo AV de tercer grado, puede ser intermitente, probablemente debido a alteraciones en el tono vagal en

combinación con la enfermedad de conducción degenerativa subyacente. Esto puede ser la causa de la recurrencia de un ritmo de escape después de la asistolia prolongada. En general, el pronóstico después de la autoresuscitación es pobre. Una revisión sistemática de Ballesteros-Peña et al.⁷ encontró que el 64% de todos los pacientes fallecieron antes del alta. Incluso si el paciente sobrevive, el riesgo de deterioro neurológico es considerable. Por lo tanto, la recuperación neurológica perfecta en nuestro caso es desconcertante. El preacondicionamiento isquémico del cerebro debido a la perfusión cerebral intermitente es una hipótesis interesante. Similar al preacondicionamiento del corazón, exponer el cerebro a períodos cortos de isquemia-reperfusión puede proteger contra los efectos debilitantes de la isquemia prolongada.⁸ Por lo tanto, la recurrencia intermitente del gasto cardíaco puede haberla salvado de un daño cerebral sustancial debido a los 4 minutos asistolia. Cuando Lázaro resucitó 4 días después de su muerte, presentamos a un paciente que se recuperó por completo después de 4 minutos de asistolia.

Referencias

Since 1982, when the **Lazarus phenomenon** was first described in medical literature, there have been at least 39 reported cases. The term Lazarus phenomenon was first coined by Bray in 1983 because of its resemblance to the biblical story of Lazarus. Lazarus phenomenon is defined as the unassisted return of spontaneous circulation after cardiac arrest. Although a rare phenomenon, it is probably an under-reported one. The only logical explanation seems to attribute such an event to impaired venous return and auto-peak end expiratory pressure. With scientific explanations in literature being unsatisfactory, a proper review of the event is warranted to synthesise the available data into a meaningful presentation to aid in developing a better understanding of this entity. According to a 2007 report by Vedamurthy Adhiyaman and colleagues, in around 82 percent of Lazarus syndrome cases to date, ROSC occurred within 10 minutes of CPR being stopped, and around 45 percent of patients experienced good neurological recovery.. But while the low number of report cases might highlight the rarity of Lazarus syndrome, scientists believe that it is much more common than studies suggest. “The Lazarus phenomenon is a grossly underreported event,” notes Maxillofacial Surgeon Dr. Vaibhav Sahni in a 2016 report. “The reason for these can be attributed to the fact that medicolegal issues are brought to light in cases which are pronounced dead which later turn out to have been alive,” he explains. “The professional expertise of the resuscitating doctor can be brought into question, not to mention the fact that such an event can lead to disrepute among colleagues.” “Another pertinent question that arises is whether the death of a particular patient occurred as a result of premature cessation of resuscitative efforts or the omission of continued resuscitation,” he adds. Precisely what causes the Lazarus phenomenon remains unclear, but there are some theories. Expect in-depth, science-backed toplines of our best stories every day. Tap in and keep your curiosity satisfied. What might cause Lazarus syndrome? Some researchers suggest that the Lazarus phenomenon may be down to a pressure buildup in the chest caused by CPR. Once CPR is ceased, this pressure may gradually release and kick-start the heart back into action. Another

theory is the delayed action of medication used as a part of resuscitation efforts, such as adrenaline. “It is possible that drugs injected through a peripheral vein are inadequately delivered centrally due to impaired venous return, and when venous return improves after stopping the dynamic hyperinflation, delivery of drugs could contribute to return of circulation,” explain Adhiyaman and colleagues. Hyperkalemia – whereby blood levels of potassium are too high – is another proposed explanation for the Lazarus phenomenon, as it has been linked to delayed ROSC. Because so few cases of Lazarus syndrome are reported, uncovering the exact mechanisms behind the condition is tricky. But perhaps it is not what is bringing a patient back to life that we should be concerned about; maybe they were never deceased. Mistaking the living for the dead As Benjamin Franklin once said, “In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.” In a clinical setting, however, a declaration of death is not as certain as one might think. In 2014 came a report of an 80-year-old woman who had been “frozen alive” in a hospital morgue after being wrongly pronounced dead. In the same year, a New York Hospital came under fire after incorrectly declaring a woman as brain dead following a drug overdose. The woman awoke shortly after being taken to the operating room for organ harvesting. Cases such as these beg the question, how is it even possible to mistakenly declare a person as dead? There are two types of death: clinical death and biological death. Clinical death is defined as the absence of a pulse, heartbeat, and breathing, while biological death is defined as the absence of brain activity. Looking at these definitions, you might assume that it would be easy to tell when a person is deceased – but in some cases, it is not so simple. There are a number of medical conditions that can make an individual “appear” dead. Hypothermia, cataplexy, and locked-in syndrome One such condition is hypothermia, whereby the body experiences a sudden, potentially fatal drop in temperature, normally caused by prolonged exposure to the cold. Hypothermia can cause heartbeat and breathing to slow, to the point where it is almost undetectable. It is believed that hypothermia led to the mistaken death of a newborn baby in Canada in 2013. There are a number of conditions in which a patient might ‘appear’ to be deceased. The baby in question was born on a sidewalk in freezing cold temperatures. Doctors were unable to detect a pulse, and the baby was declared dead. Two hours later,

the baby started moving. Dr. Michael Klein, of the University of British Columbia in Canada, said that the baby's exposure to such cold temperatures may explain the situation. "The whole circulation would have stopped but the neurological condition of the child could be protected by the cold." Catalepsy and locked-in syndrome are examples of other conditions in which the living could be mistaken for dead. Catalepsy is characterized by a trance-like state, slowed breathing, reduced sensitivity, and complete immobility, which can last from minutes to weeks.