

Country cardiograms case 51

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A 54-year-old man presents to a rural emergency department with chest pain. At triage, his vital signs are as follows: temperature 37.0°C, heart rate 72 beats/min, respiratory rate 16 breaths/min, blood pressure 142/90 mm Hg and oxygen saturation 98%. At check-in, he becomes unresponsive, and a “code blue” is called. He has a weak, thready pulse with agonal respirations and a Glasgow Coma Scale score of 13 (eye response 4, verbal response 4, motor response 5). Vital signs are heart rate 45 beats/min, blood pressure 72/57 mm Hg and oxygen saturation 99%. He denies having chest pain but reports substantial shortness of breath. He is revived with prompt intravenous fluid resuscitation and supplementary oxygen, and vital signs return to normal.

A history is obtained of left-sided anterior chest pain radiating to the neck after a walk the previous night; the chest pain was intermittent throughout the night and is what brought him to the emergency department. He also reports new back pain concurrent with

the chest pain. He has never experienced symptoms like this. His medical history is unremarkable, and he takes no regular medications. He does not smoke and has no dyslipidemia. He has a positive family history of coronary artery disease: his father had a myocardial infarction at 38 years of age.

Physical examination shows him to be pale, diaphoretic and obese. Breath sounds are clear bilaterally, without adventitious sounds. Heart sounds are normal, without murmur. His abdomen is soft and nontender, neck veins are flat and calves are supple, without edema. Investigations show a normal initial 12-lead electrocardiogram (ECG); an unremarkable chest radiograph; normal complete blood count, renal function and electrolytes; and negative troponin (< 0.01 µg/L) and D-dimer (450 µg/L) assays. A second ECG performed 15 minutes later is shown in Figure 1. What is your interpretation?

For the answer, see page 114.

Competing interests: None declared.

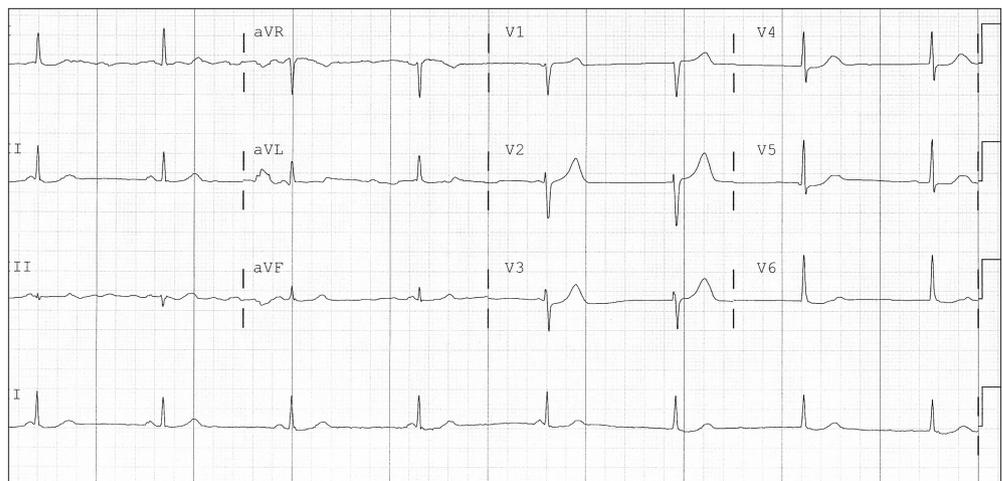


Fig. 1. Electrocardiogram of a 54-year-old man with chest pain.