

(often hours long or all day) central chest ache. It is rarely pleuritic and rarely associated with shortness of breath. The complaint has not increased or decreased since she stopped her birth control pills. Her examination is normal except her respiratory rate is 22. CXR and EKG are normal. In this patient, I would obtain an ABG, and when the ABG shows a PaO<sub>2</sub> that is 97 percent (as expected), I would decide against continuing testing for PE.

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The above letter was referred to the author of the article in question, who offers the following reply.

*To the Editor:* I appreciate Doctor Allen's comments and agree that an initial laboratory screen is appropriate in the workup of suspected thromboembolism, which is why it was discussed in the initial portion of the article. Indeed, a correction should be made to Figure 1 and the accompanying text. In earlier drafts of the article, this was included in the algorithm and discussion but was inadvertently left out in the final draft of the paper.

I would like to comment, however, that chest radiographs and electrocardiograms are often more useful in *ruling in* other disorders as opposed to *ruling out* pulmonary embolism. Cases as outlined by Doctor Allen of young, minimal-risk patients can be difficult. I was involved in the case of an 18-year-old man who after a 16-hour airplane trip developed a pulmonary embolism. He presented very classically, allowing a straightforward workup but had no other known risk factors other than the period of immobilization. Low-risk patients who present in an atypical fashion are a diagnostic difficulty for any physician. To what degree the case is pursued depends on the individual practitioner's clinical judgment and the patient's presentation. Is there an underlying history of anxiety? Consider a man in his middle-to-late 30s who smokes, has a family history of premature atherosclerotic coronary artery disease, and presents with somewhat nonclassic cardiac-type chest pain. If a cardiac stress test were performed, what would be the chance of obtaining a borderline nondiagnostic treadmill result, perhaps then requiring further evaluation, versus the risk of not aggressively pursuing a cardiac workup?

An algorithm almost always should be viewed as a guideline adaptable to different clinical situations and is not meant as an absolute standard.

I believe that where the workup ends in such a patient as presented by Doctor Allen depends on the clinician and the patient. What is the likelihood that this is anxiety; what is the likelihood that this is musculoskeletal; could this be pericarditis; could this be a small spontaneous pneumothorax; could this be a pulmonary embolism with a normal arterial oxygen concentration? Would I pursue a low-probability lung scan in such a

patient; would I confirm a high-probability lung scan with an angiogram in such a patient, etc.? Most likely, the case presented was not related to thromboembolism. To what level of certainty pulmonary embolism is ruled out in such a patient I believe depends on the probability of other diagnostic possibilities. What was the final diagnosis?

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## Books Received

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*Books that appear to be of particular interest will be reviewed as space permits.*

- AIDS: The burdens of history.** By Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox. 362 pp. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989. \$28.50 (cloth), \$12.95 (paper).
- American Pediatrics: The social dynamics of professionalism 1880-1980.** By Sydney A. Halpern. 228 pp. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988. \$27.50.
- Color Atlas of AIDS.** By Alvin E. Friedman-Kien. 155 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1989. \$39.95.
- Conn's Current Therapy 1989.** By Robert E. Rakel. 1114 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1989. \$49.95.
- Dermatological Signs of Internal Disease.** By Jeffery P. Callen, Joseph Jorizzo, Warren Piette, Kenneth E. Greer, Neal Penneys, and John J. Zone. 383 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$55.00.
- Deviance and the Family.** Edited by Frank E. Hagan and Marvin B. Susman. 176 pp. Binghamton, NY, The Haworth Press, 1988. \$34.95.
- Diagnosis and Treatment of Internal Disease.** By K. Bork and W. Bruninger. 247 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$89.00.
- Essentials of Clinical Nutrition.** By Elaine B. Feldman. 605 pp. Philadelphia, F.A. Davis Company, 1988. \$35.00.
- Families and Health.** By William J. Doherty and Thomas L. Campbell. 159 pp. Newbury Park, CA, Sage Publications, Inc., 1988. \$9.95.
- Healthy and Whole.** By A. Earl Mgebroff. 221 pp. St. Louis, CBP Press, 1988.
- Heart Disease: Review and assessment.** By Michael E. Mendelsohn, Bradford C. Berk, and Eugene Braunwald. 240 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders, 1989. \$35.00.
- Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy with Children.** Second edition. By Karen Olness and G. Gail Gardner. 431 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$39.00.
- Instructions for Patients.** Fourth edition. By H. Winter Griffith. 369 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$47.95.
- The Medical Management of AIDS.** Edited by Merle A. Sande and Paul A. Volberding. 383 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$30.00.
- Medicine for the Practicing Physician.** Second edition. Edited by J. Willis Hurst. 1857 pp. Stoneham, MA, Butterworths, 1988. \$95.00.
- Outpatient Surgery.** By George J. Hill. 730 pp. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, 1988. \$60.00.