



SOCIETY OF TRAUMA NURSES

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Thoracic Trauma



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Objectives

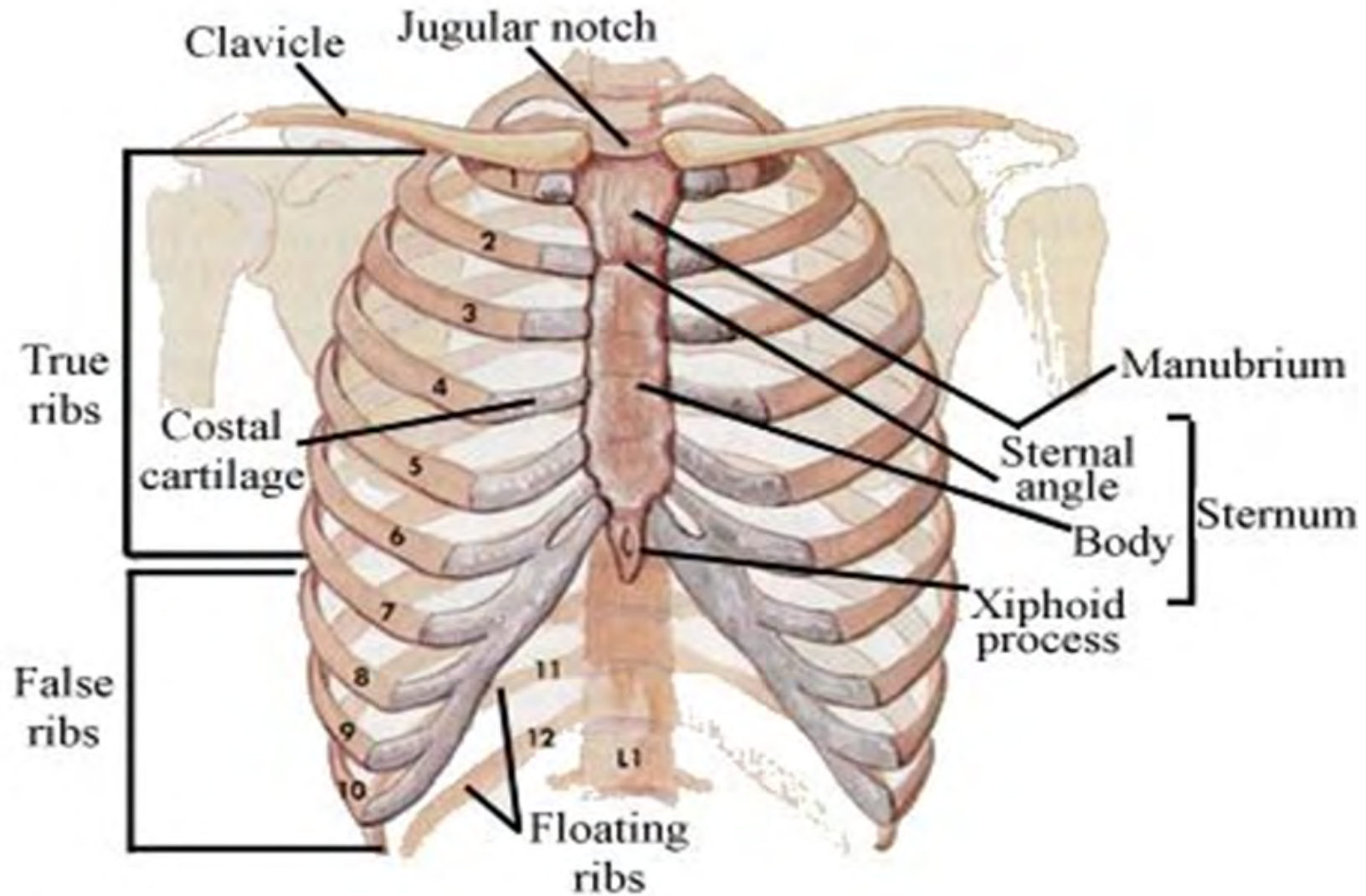
**At the conclusion of this presentation
the participant will be able to:**

- Identify anatomy within the thorax
- List life-threatening injuries that should be identified during the primary survey
- Describe resuscitative interventions for patients with thoracic trauma
- Explain clinical manifestations associated with life-threatening injuries
- Identify general treatment for patients with thoracic trauma

Incidence

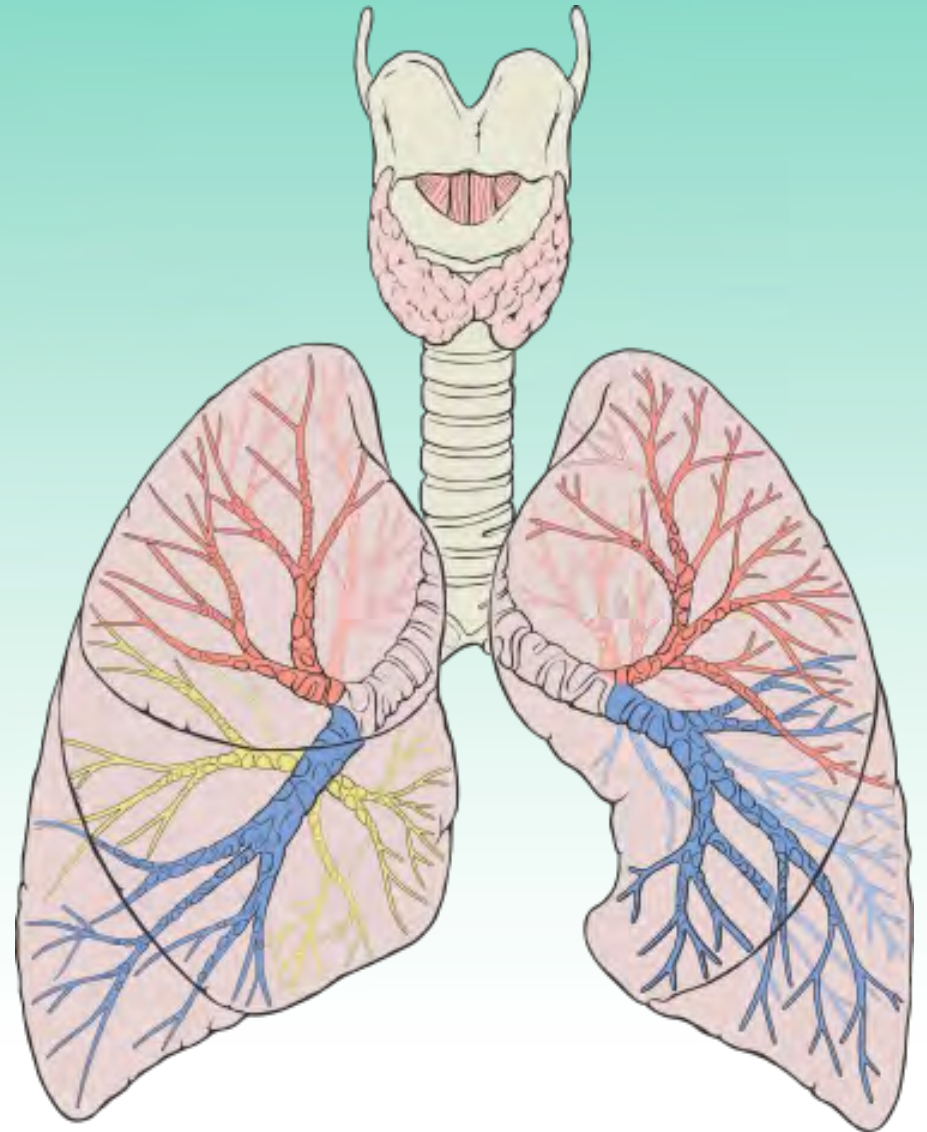
- Common in blunt and penetrating trauma
- Some of the most deadly and dramatic injuries
- Early recognition and treatment are crucial
- Basic interventions can save lives

Thoracic Anatomy



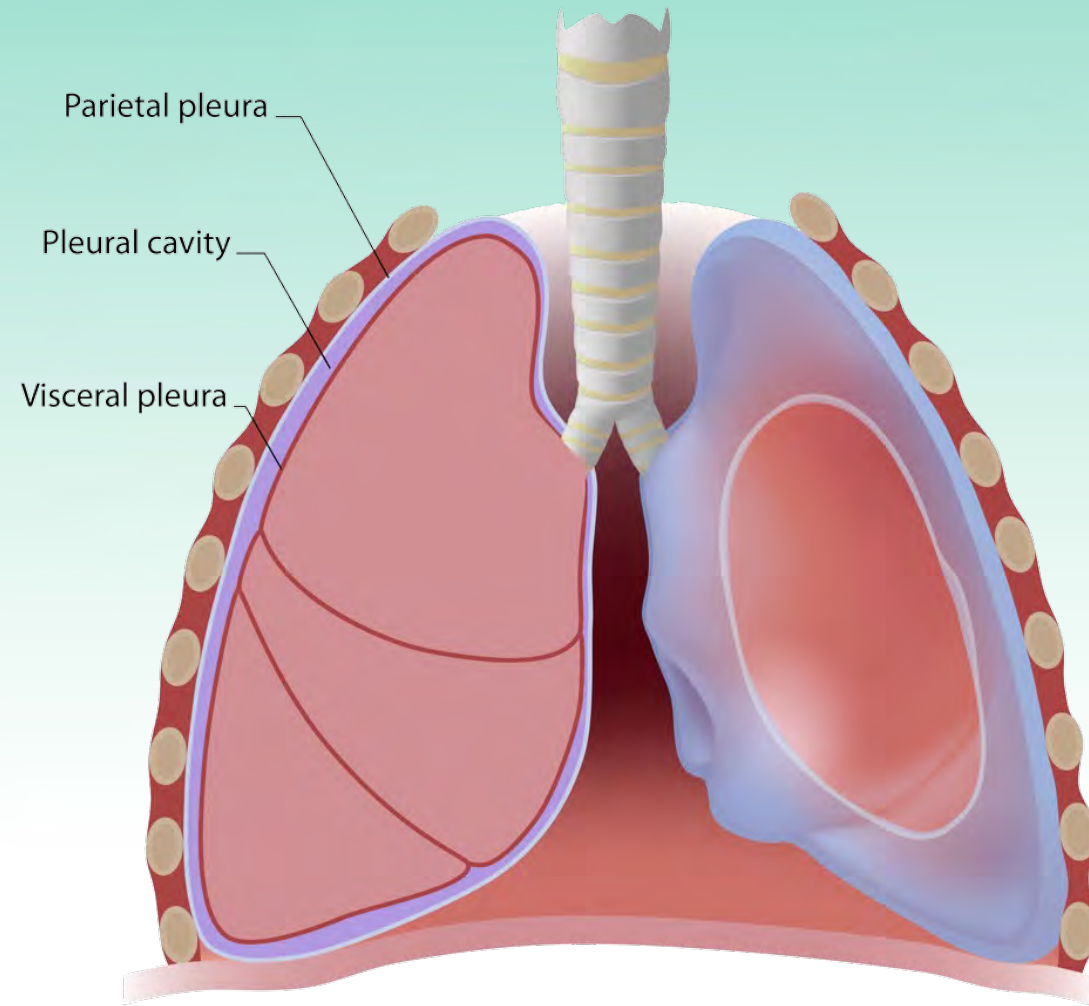
Lungs

- Cone shaped organs
- Separated by heart and pulmonary vessels
- Hilum is entry point for bronchi and blood vessels

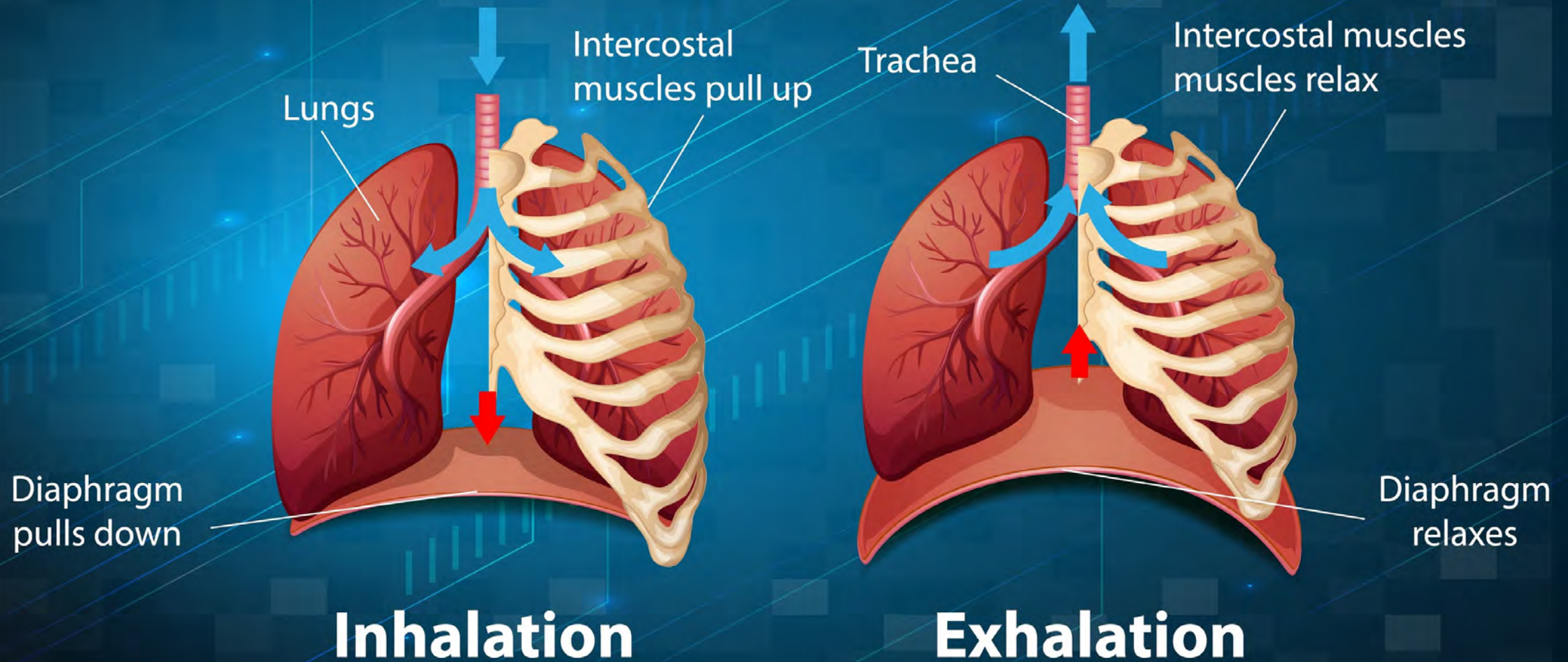


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Pleura



THE DIAPHRAGM FUNCTIONS IN BREATHING



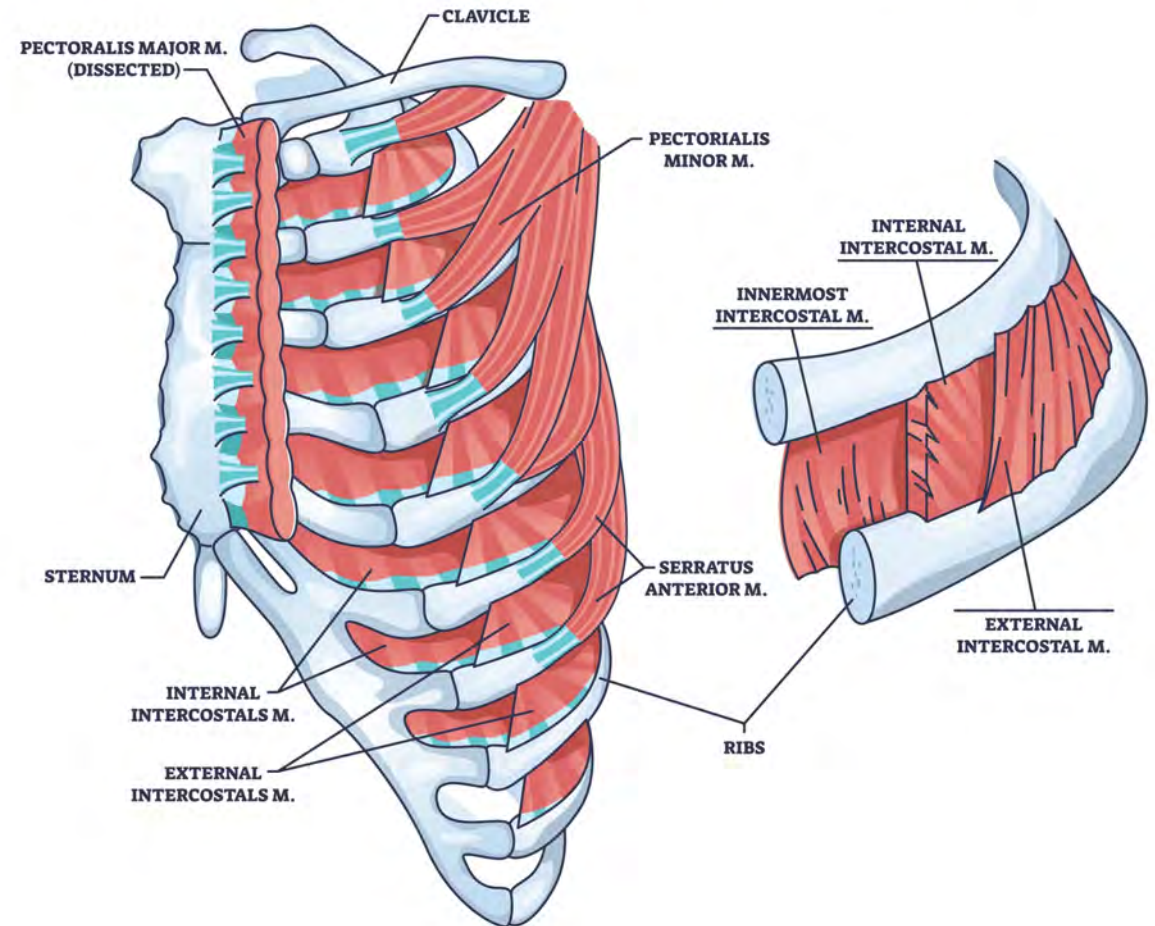
Muscles of Ventilation

Rib cage muscles

- **Intercostal muscles**
 - External & internal
 - Lift ribs to enlarge thorax
 - Innervated by intercostal nerves
- **Parasternal muscles**
- **Scalene and neck**

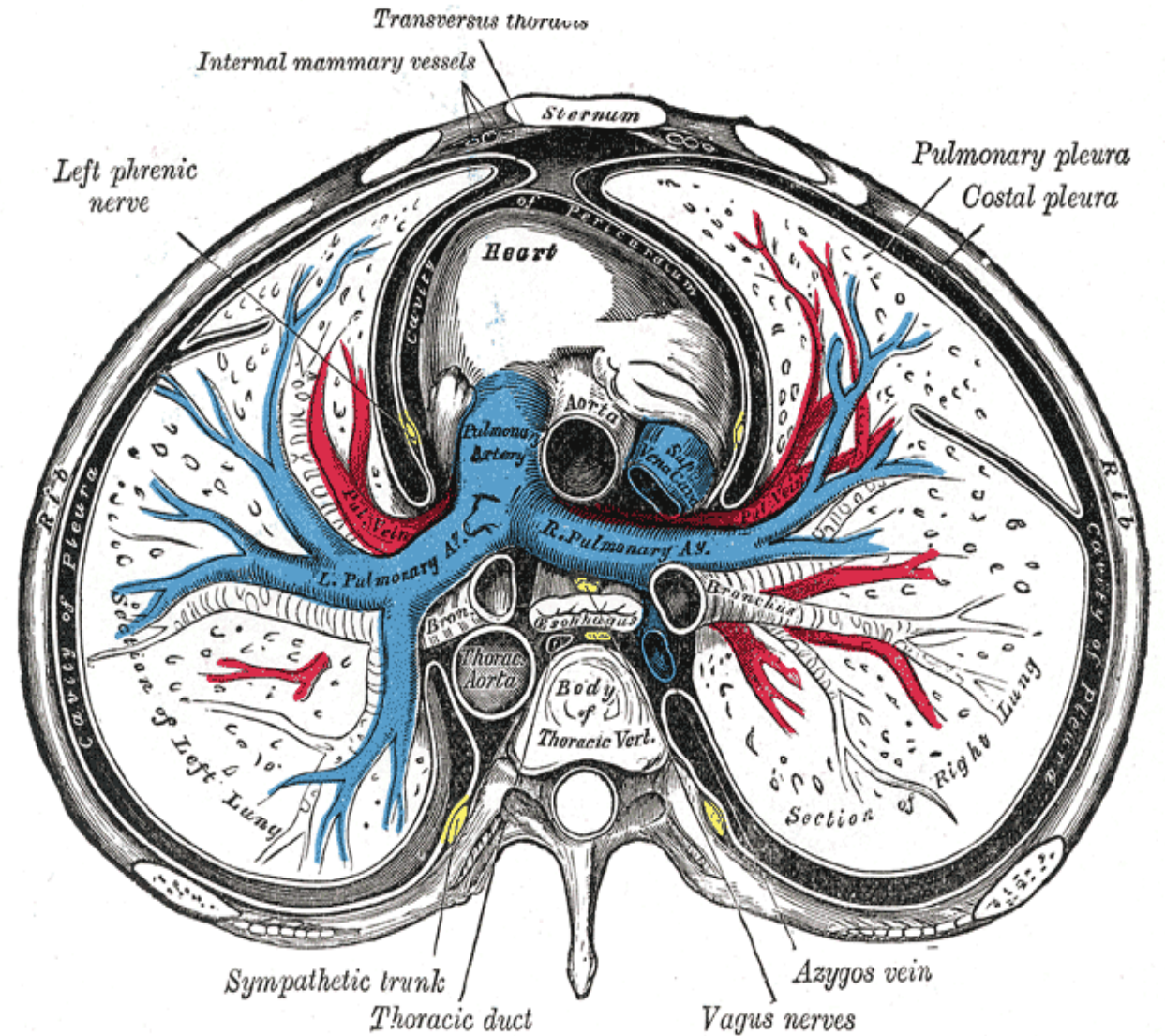
Abdominal muscles

INTERCOSTAL MUSCLES

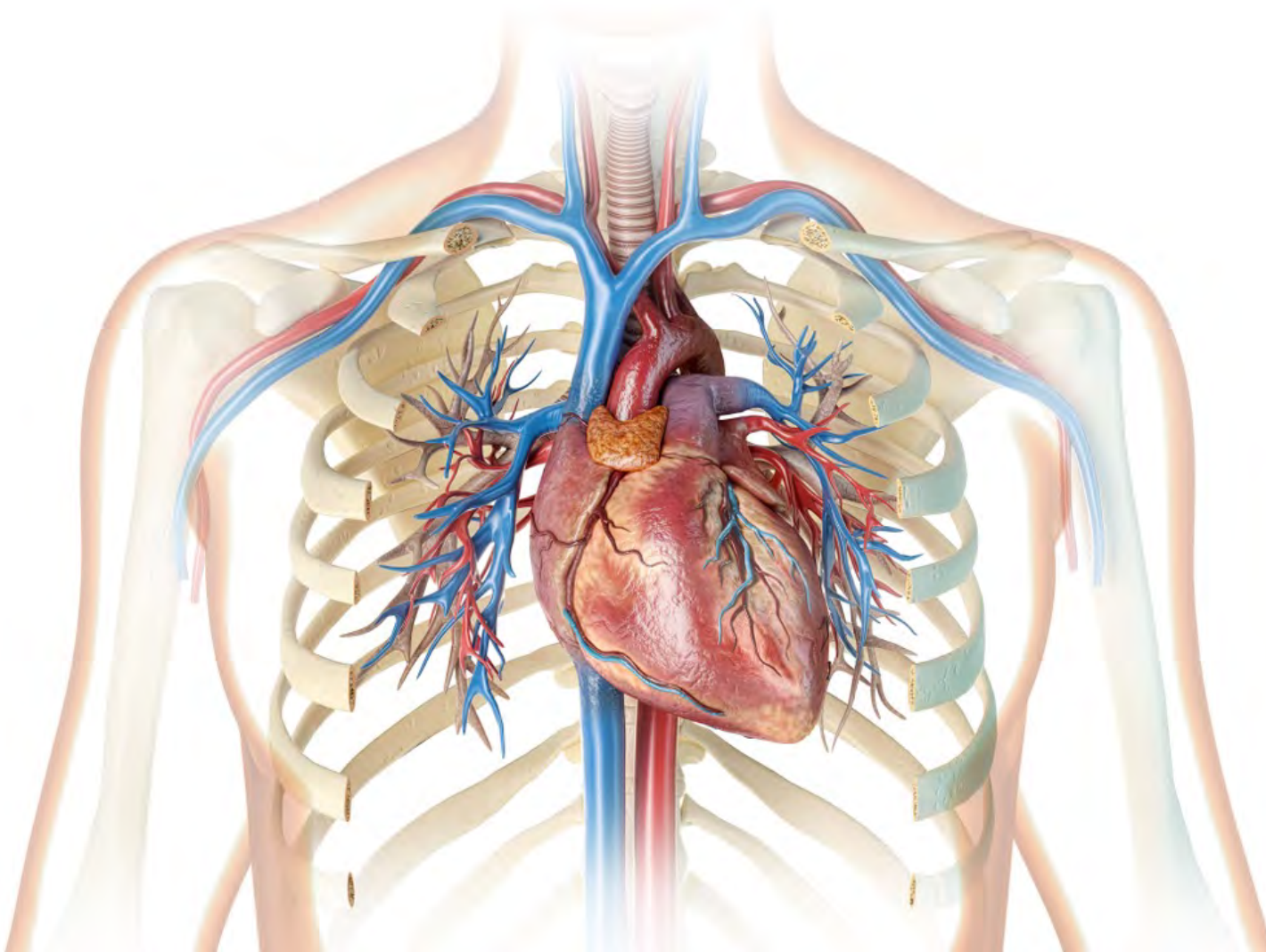


Mediastinum

- Heart
- Thymus
- Great Vessels
- Trachea
- Thoracic duct
- Lymph nodes
- Vagus & phrenic nerves
- Sympathetic trunks



Heart and Great Vessels

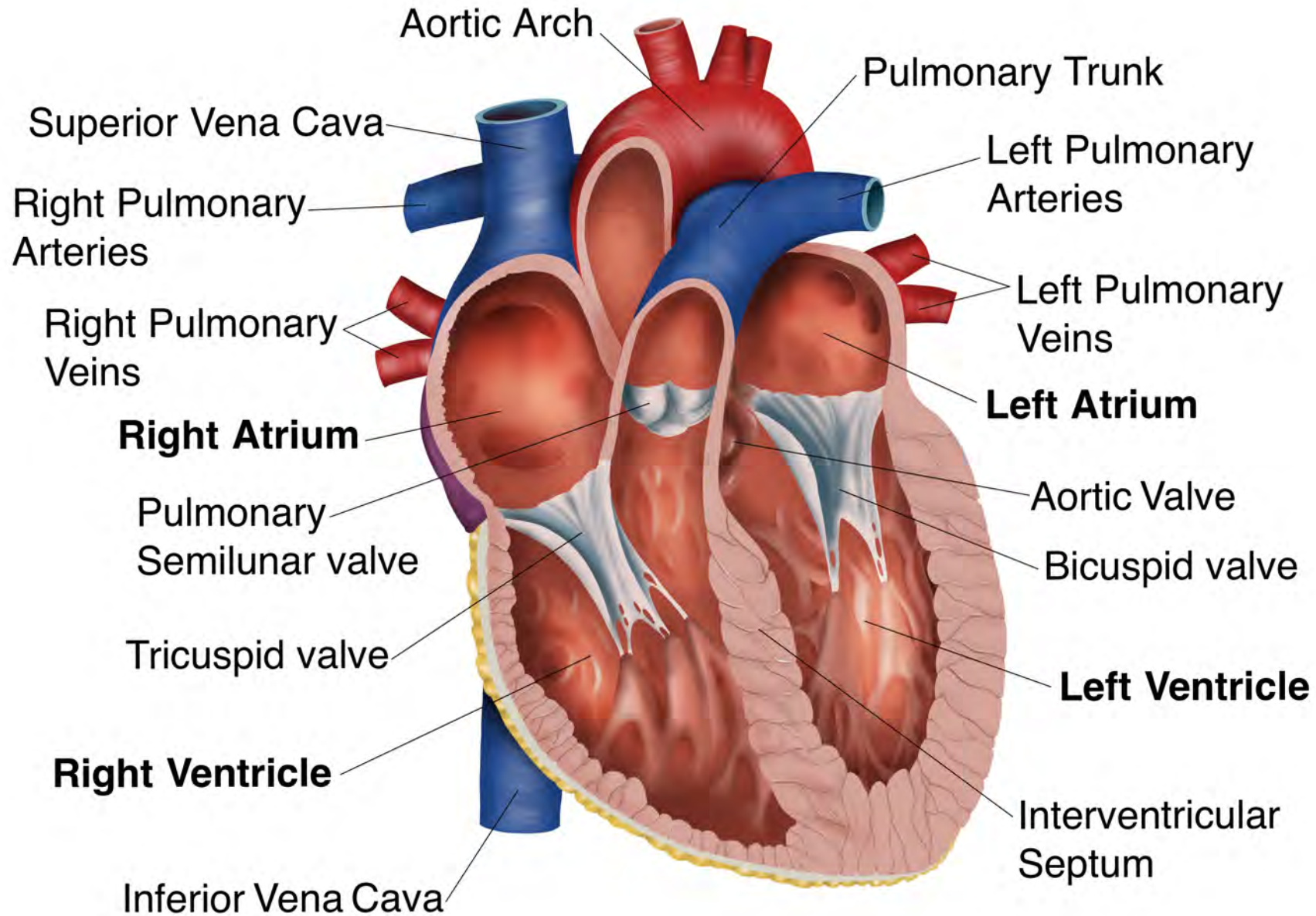


Heart

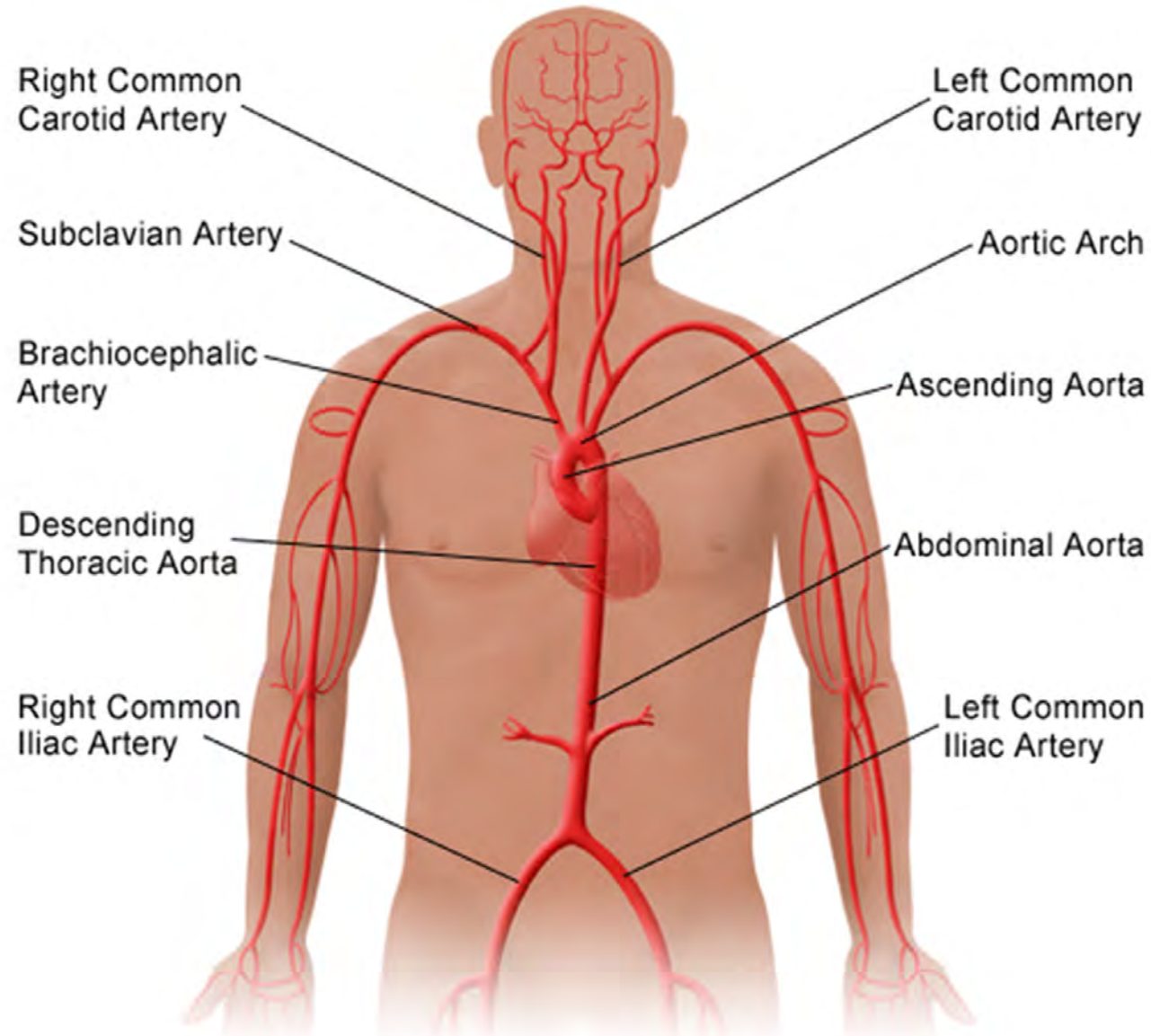
Aorta

Subclavian

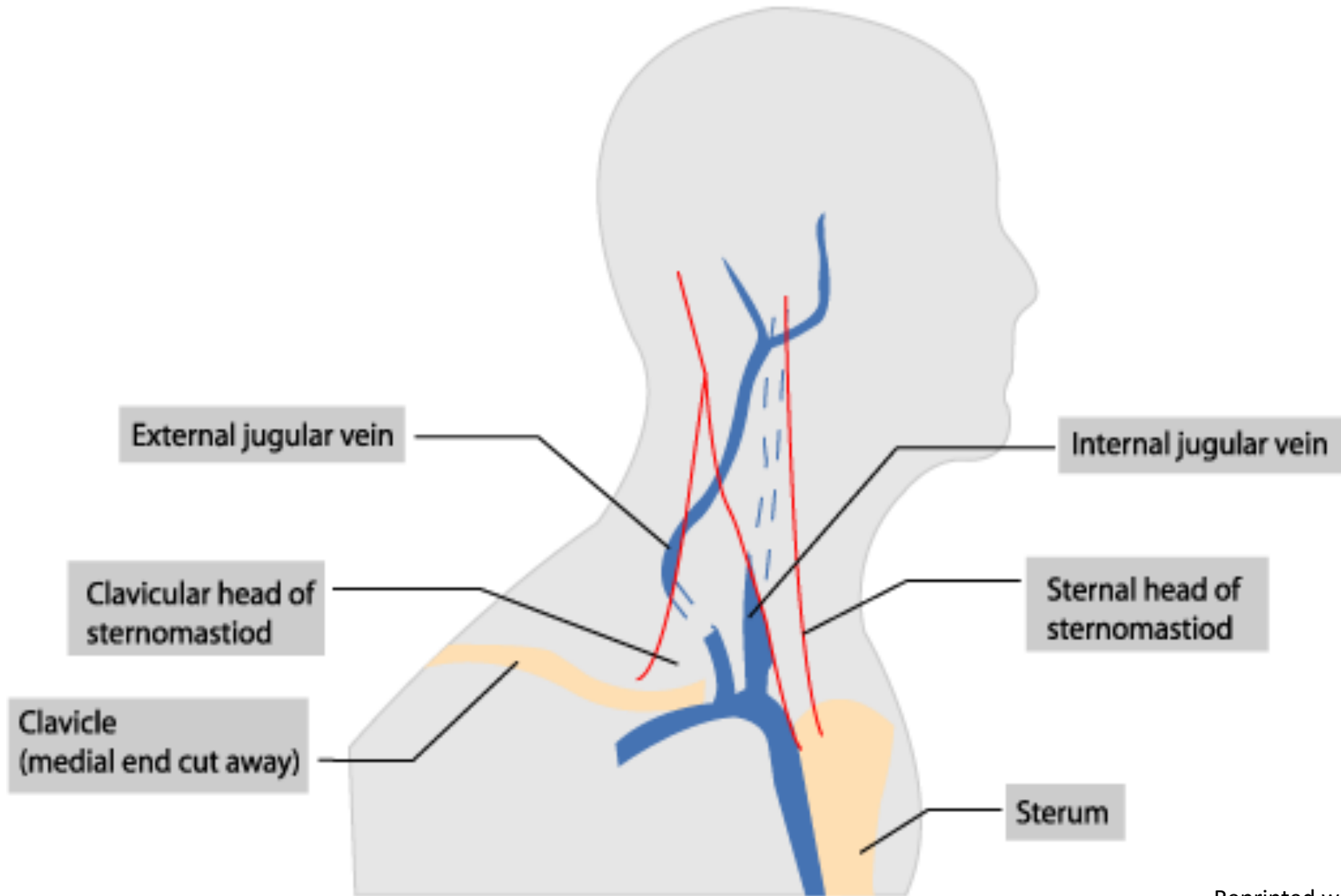
Jugular



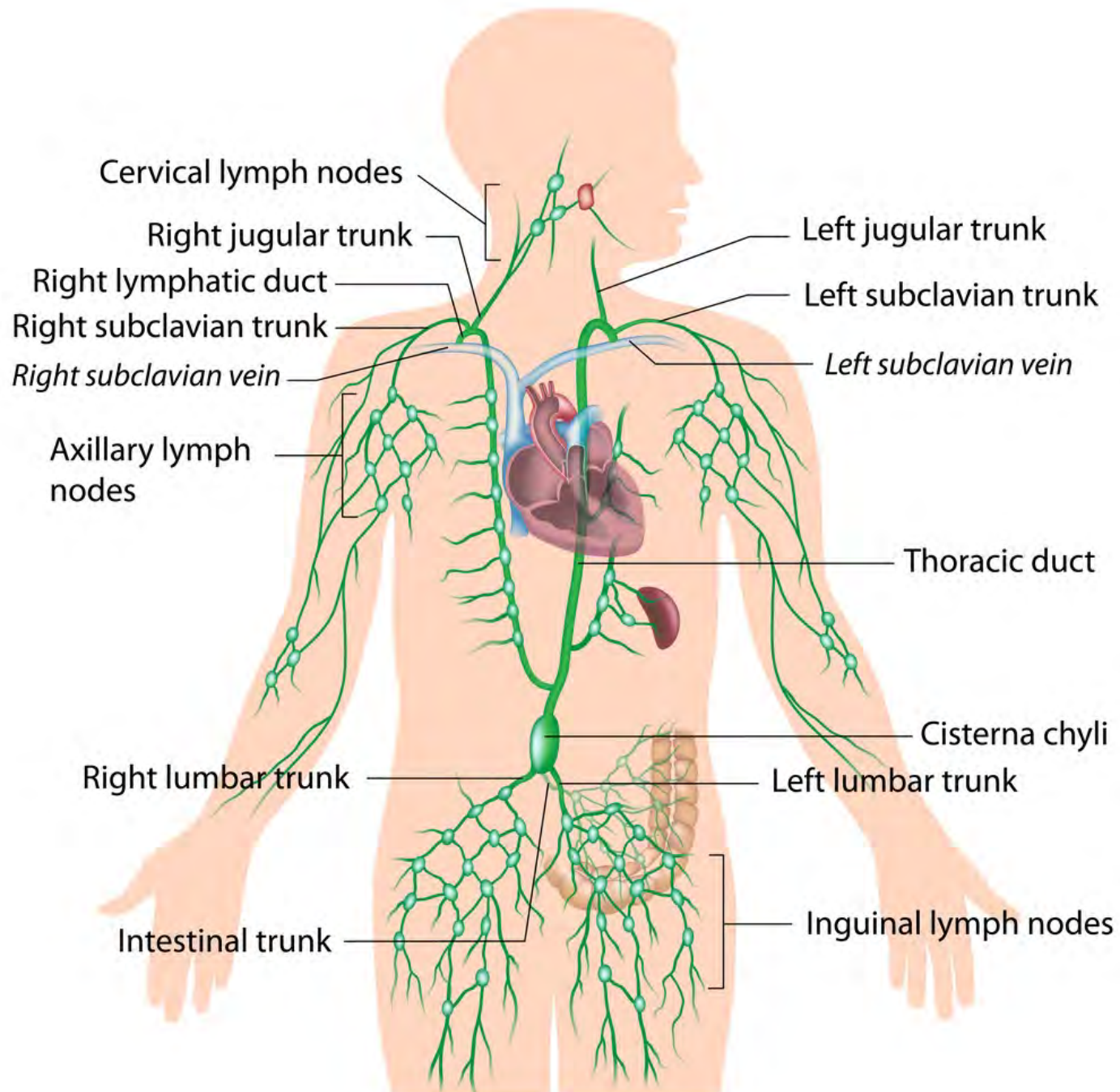
Anatomy of the Aorta



Jugular Veins



Thoracic Duct



- Lymphatic Duct
- Empties into venous system
- Protected by spine posteriorly
- Mediastinum anteriorly

Thoracic Assessment

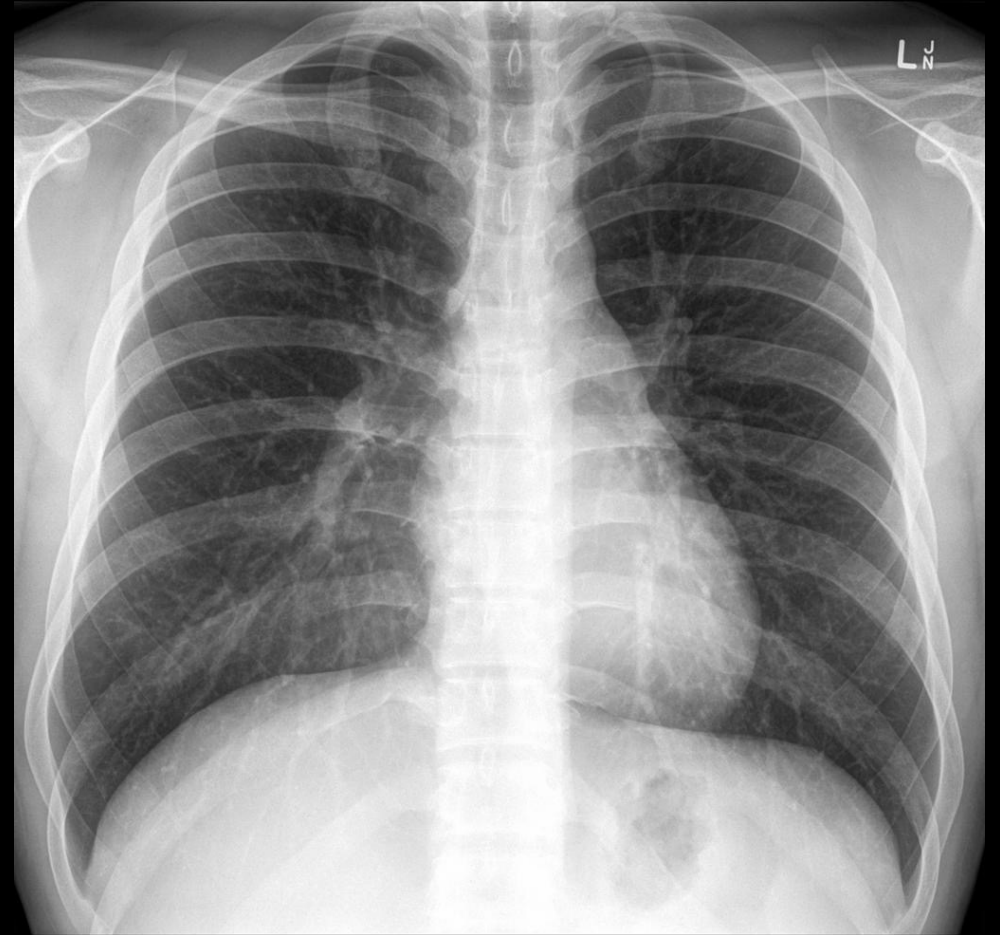
- Primary & Secondary Survey with ABC's
- Interventions for any life-threatening injuries





Diagnostics

- Chest X-Ray
- Focused Assessment with Sonography for Trauma (FAST)
- Computed Tomography
- Arteriography and other diagnostics







Immediately Life Threatening

- Airway obstruction
- Tracheobronchial tree Injury
- Tension pneumothorax
- Open pneumothorax
- Massive hemothorax
- Cardiac tamponade
- Traumatic circulatory arrest

A close-up photograph of a patient's neck. The skin is reddish and appears to be under a surgical drape. A green strap is visible at the bottom of the frame, likely used for immobilization or positioning during a procedure.

Airway Obstruction

High index of suspicion if:

- Secretions/blood/vomitus in airway
- Direct laryngeal/neck trauma
- Expanding neck hematoma

Symptoms

- Tachypnea
- Hypoxia
- Agitation
- Hoarseness and dysphonia
- Stridor
- Subcutaneous emphysema
- Palpable fracture crepitus
- Low oxygen saturation (late sign)



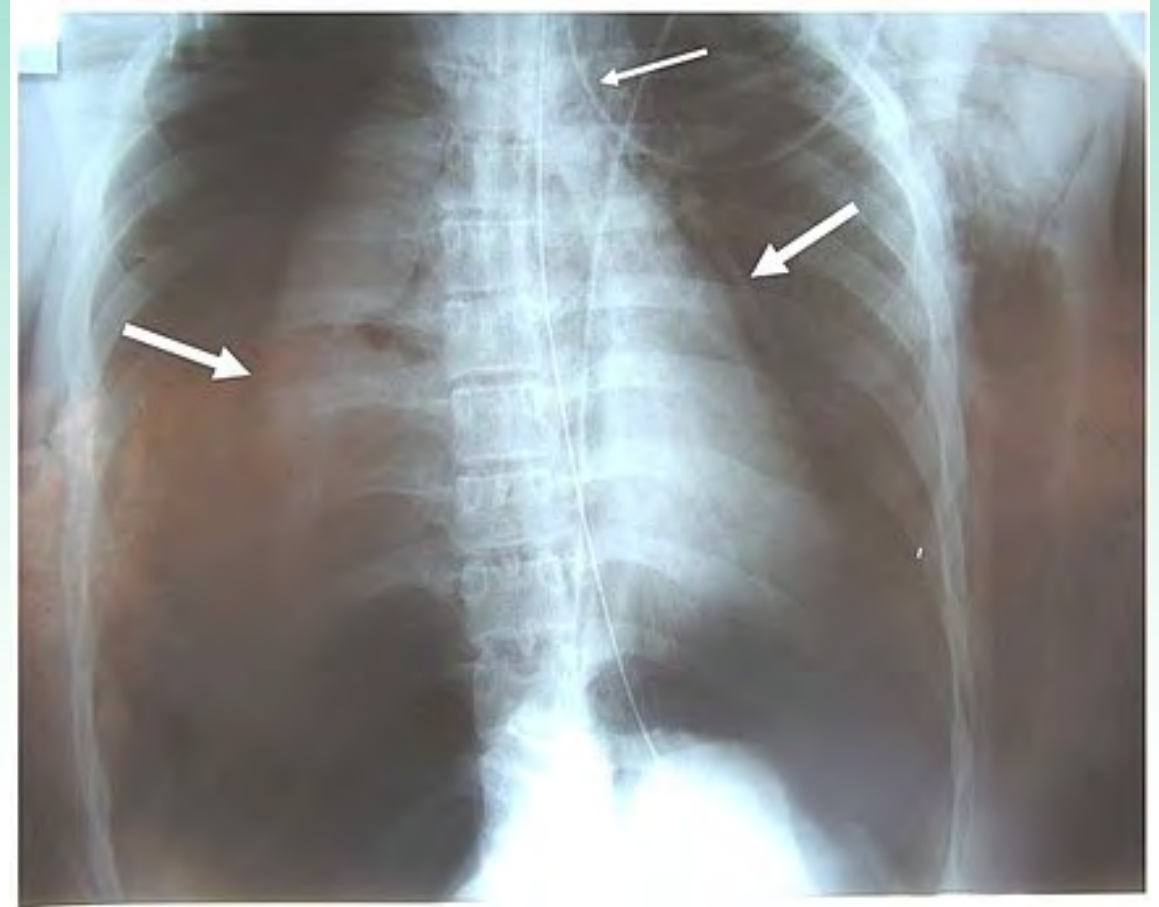


Treatment

- Control airway in primary survey
- Utilize adjuncts
- Intubate cautiously or perform a tracheostomy

Tracheobronchial Tree Injury

- Dyspnea and respiratory distress
- Hemoptysis
- Cervical subcutaneous emphysema
- Tension pneumothorax
- Cyanosis
- Dysphonia
- Hoarseness



Morgan Le Guen, Catherine Beigelman, Belaid Bouhemad, Yang Wenjie, Frederic Marmion, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Tracheobronchial Tree Injury

Treatment

- Chest tube placement
- Bronchoscopy
- Immediate surgical intervention



Tension Pneumothorax

Increase in intrapleural pressure



Collapsed lung on affected side

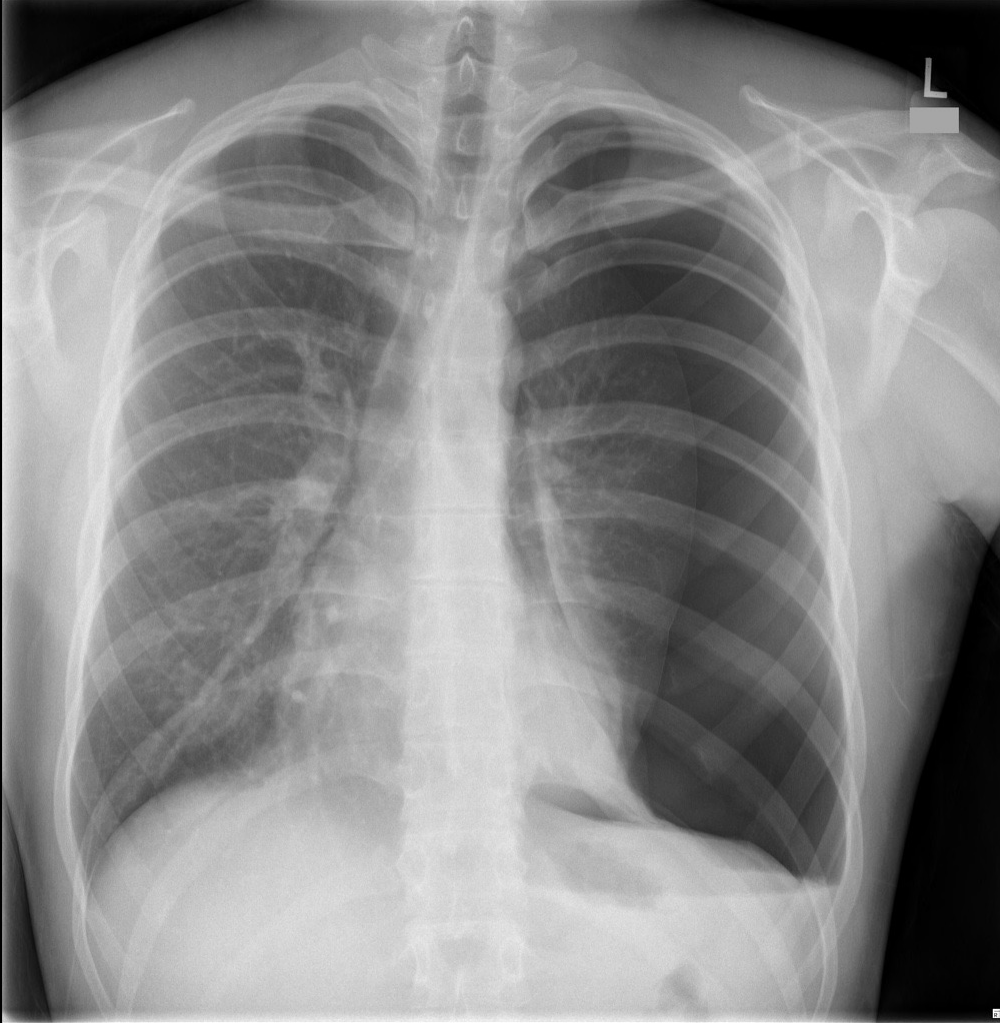


Shift mediastinum to opposite side



High intrathoracic pressures

Risk for Tension Pneumothorax



- Extension from simple pneumothorax
- Tracheobronchial tree injuries
- Rib fractures
- Lung parenchyma injury
- Barotrauma
- Clogged/clamped chest tube

Simple vs. Tension PTX



Tension Pneumothorax

Symptoms

- Respiratory distress
- Absent/decreased breath sounds on affected side
- Asymmetric chest movement
- Jugular vein distention
- Tracheal deviation (late sign)
- Shock (late sign)
- Diagnosis should be made on clinical presentation

Tension Pneumothorax

Treatment

- Immediate needle decompression
 - Large-caliber needle
 - Between 4th and 5th intercostal space midaxillary line
- Chest tube insertion
 - Tube thoracostomy
 - Insert at 4th or 5th intercostal space between the anterior and midaxillary line



Open Pneumothorax

“Sucking Chest Wound”

- Pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Tachypnea
- Decreased breath sounds on the affected side
- Noise movement of air



Open Pneumothorax

Treatment

- Chest tube is the emergent treatment.
- Monitor for re-expansion of lung or for development of tension pneumothorax.



Massive Hemothorax

- Accumulation of a large amount of blood (> 1.5 L) in the pleural space
- Common in penetrating trauma with hilar or systemic vessel disruption
- May be caused by major blunt chest trauma
- CXR will show unilateral “white out”



Massive Hemothorax

Treatment

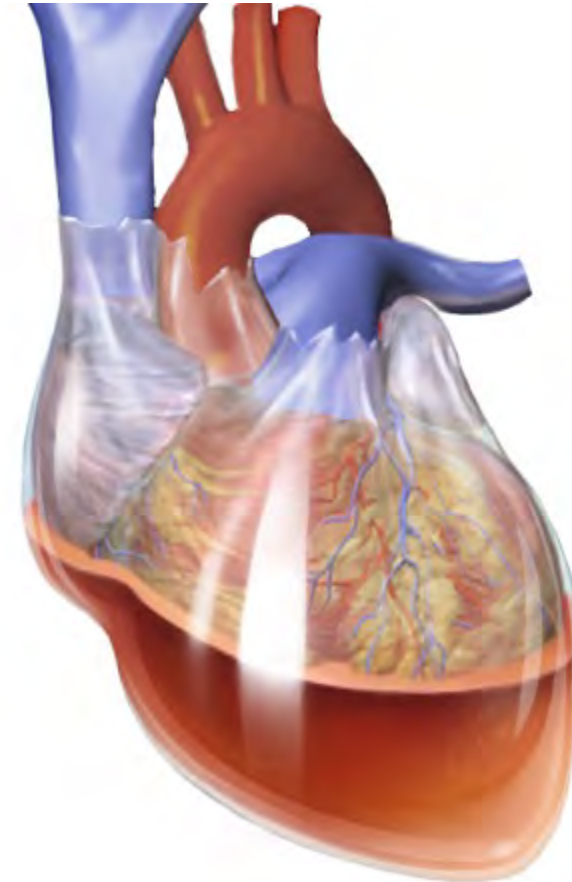
- Chest tube placement
- Set up for autotransfusion if appropriate
- Administer blood as indicated
- Potential thoracotomy

Cardiac Tamponade

Commonly result of penetrating trauma

Symptoms:

- Reluctant to lie flat
- Feeling of “impending doom”
- May have “Beck’s triad”
 - Distended neck veins
 - Hypotension
 - Muffled heart sounds
- +Fast exam



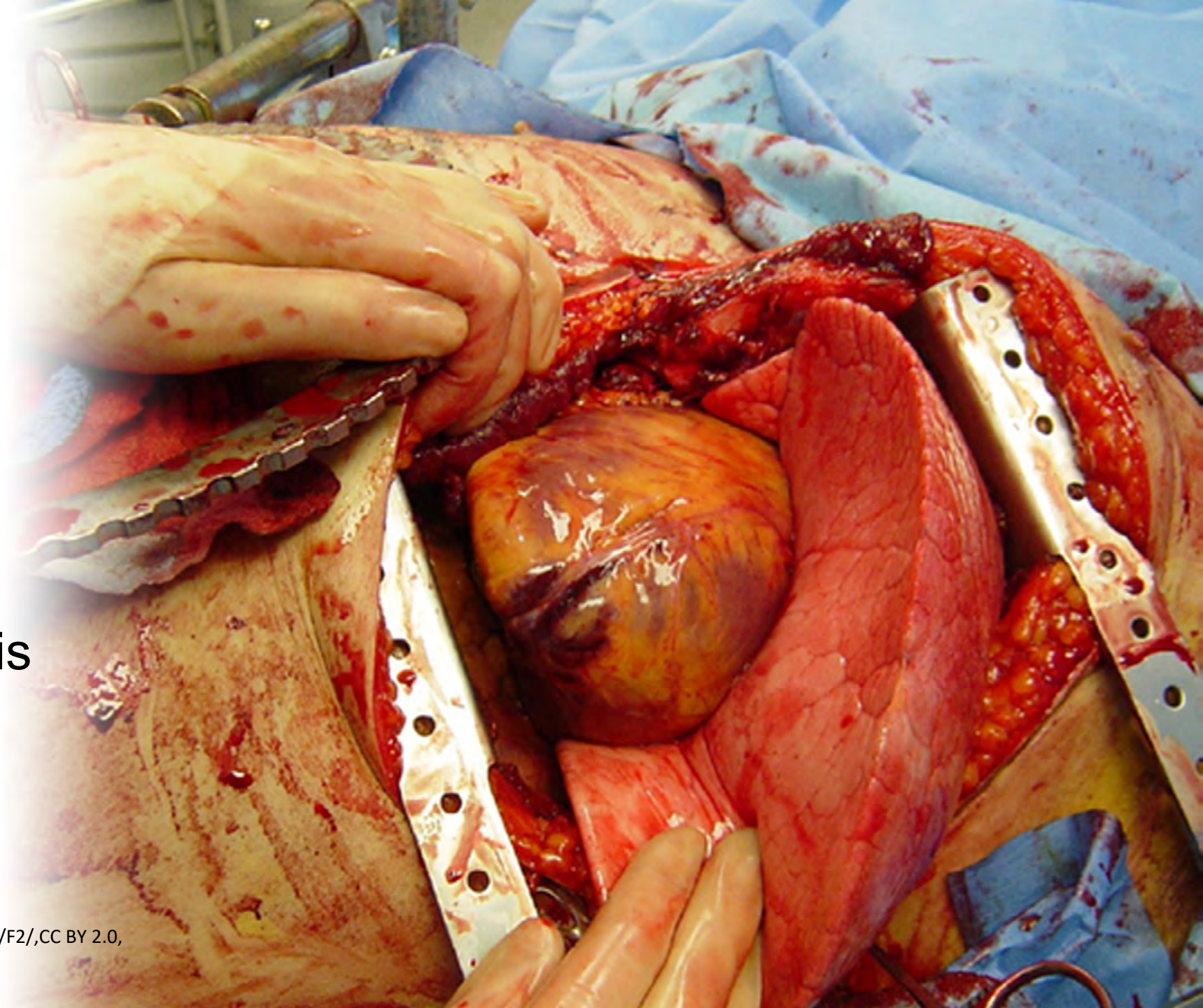
Cardiac Tamponade



Cardiac Tamponade

Treatment

- Emergent thoracotomy or sternotomy
- Pericardiocentesis



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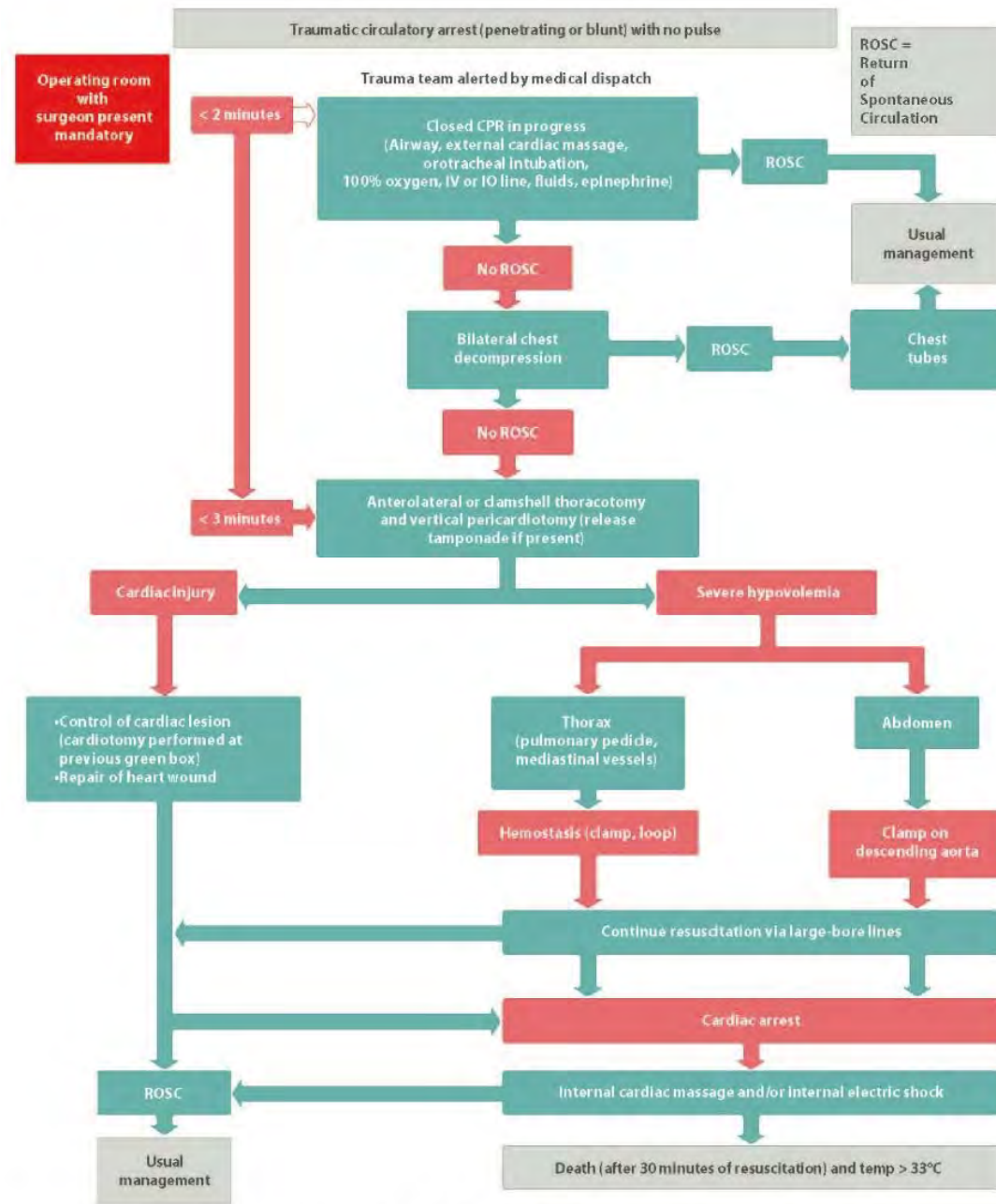
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Traumatic Circulatory Arrest

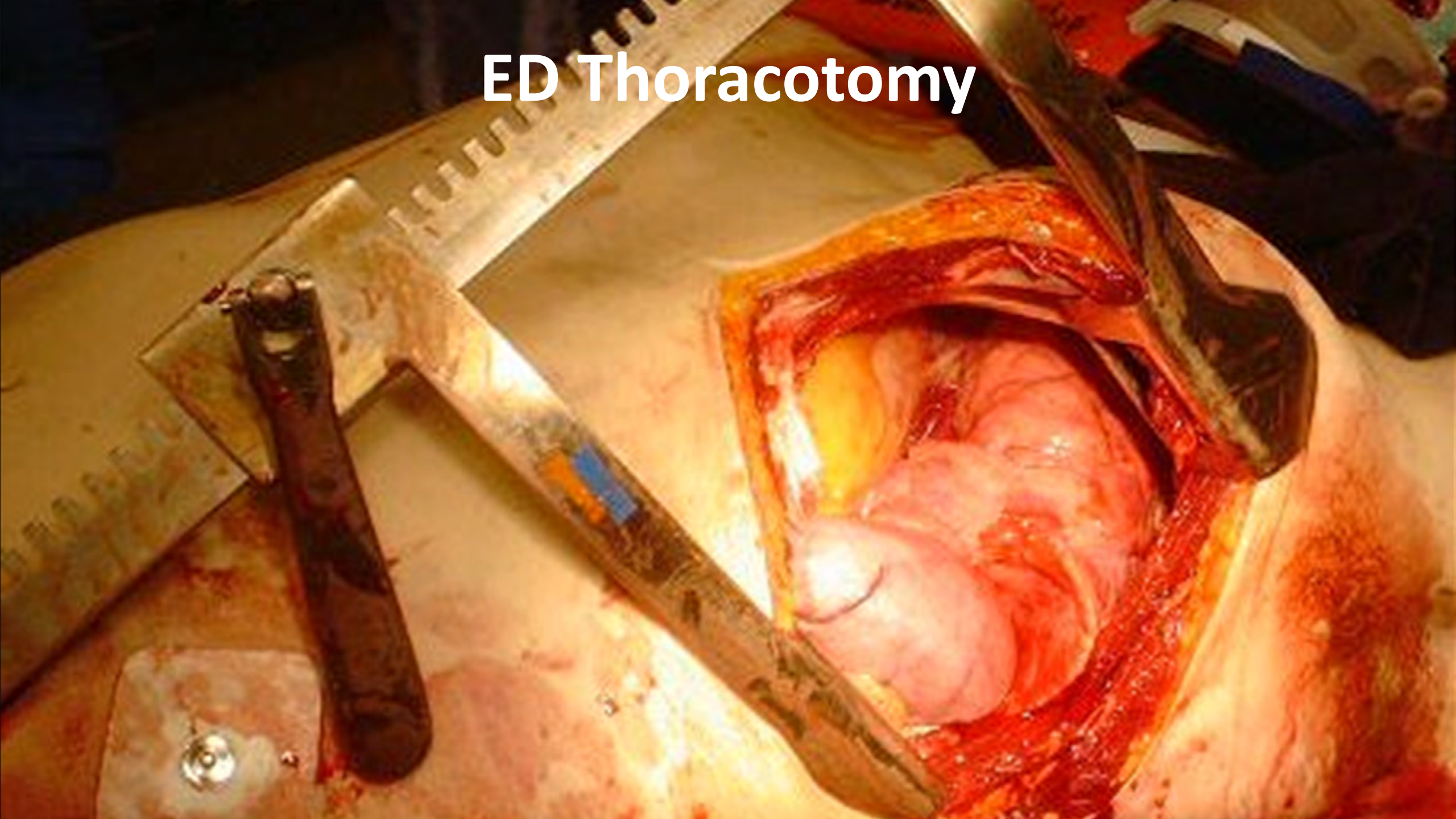
Causes:

- Severe hypoxia
- Tension pneumothorax
- Profound hypovolemia
- Cardiac tamponade
- Cardiac herniation
- Severe myocardial contusion



Algorithm for management of traumatic circulatory arrest. ECM = external cardiac massage; OTI = orotracheal intubation; IVL = intravenous line; IOL = intraosseous line.

ED Thoracotomy



Potentially Life Threatening

Pneumothorax

Hemothorax

Pulmonary Contusion

Flail Chest

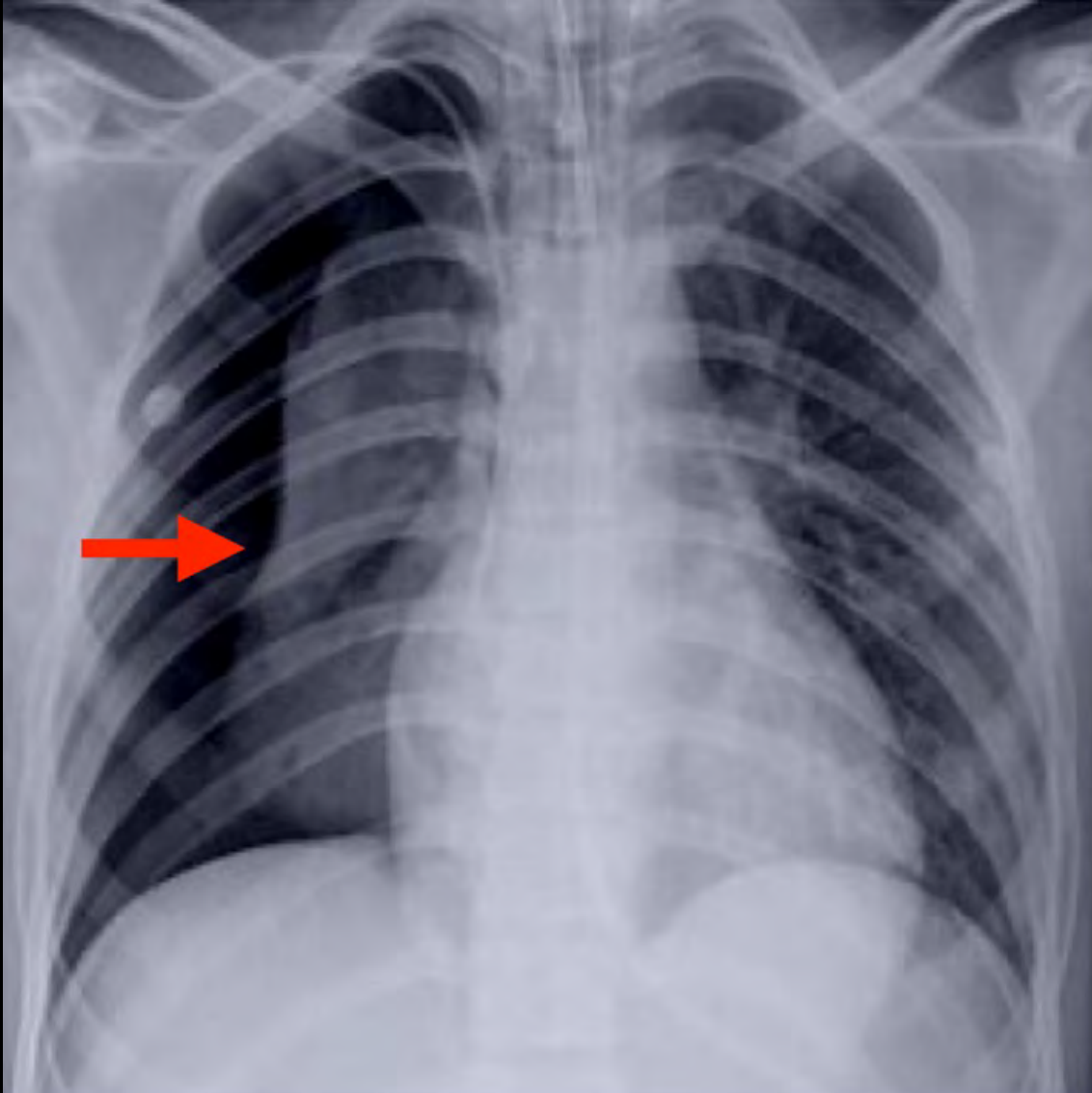
Blunt Cardiac Injury

Aortic Disruption

Diaphragmatic Injury

Esophageal Rupture

Pneumothorax



Etiology:

- Blunt
- Penetrating

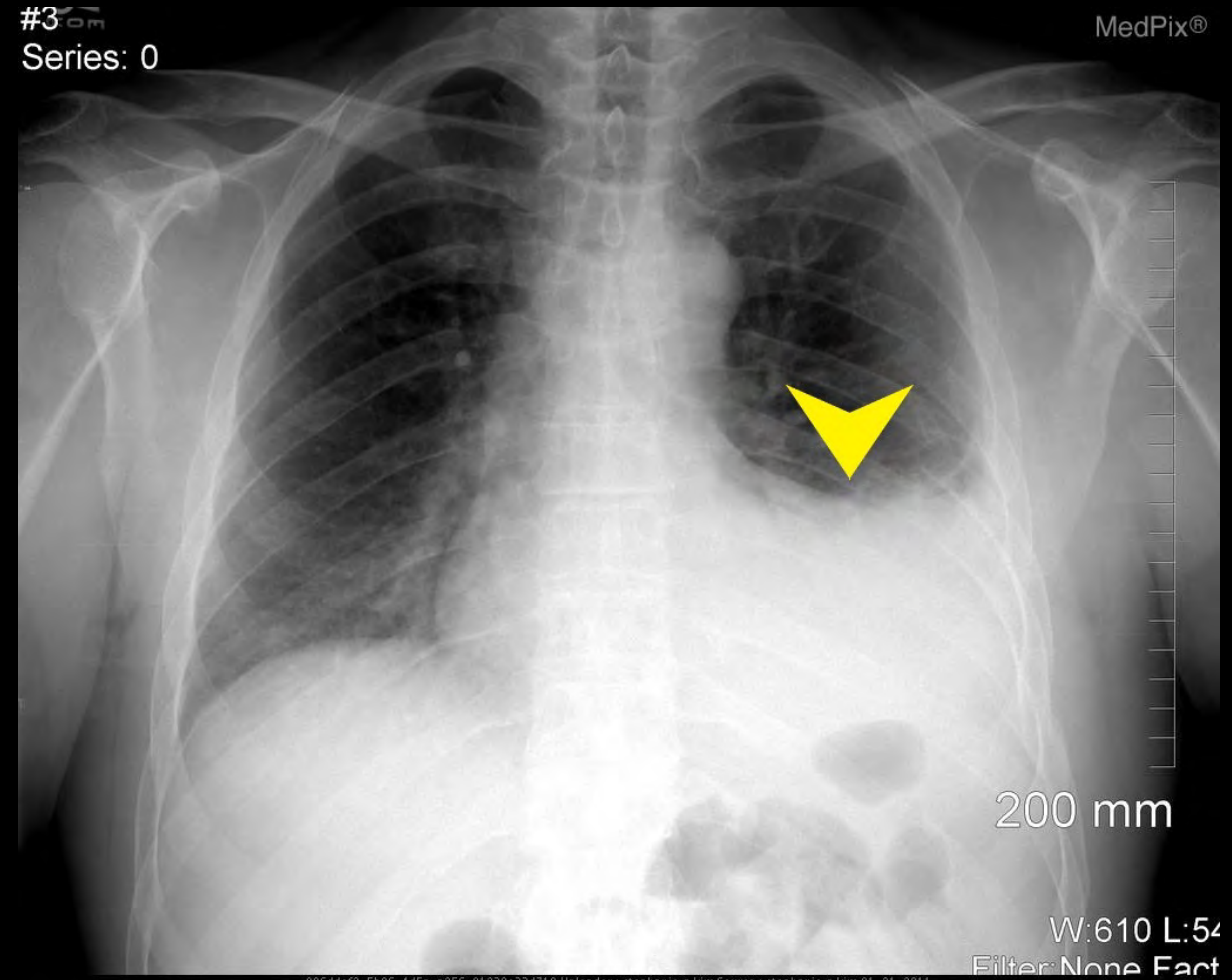
Collection of Air in:

- Pleural space
- Visceral pleura
- Parietal pleura

Hemothorax

Etiology:

- Lung laceration
 - Intercostal vessel laceration
 - Internal mammary artery laceration
 - Thoracic spine fracture/dislocation
-
- Collection of Blood or other fluid in pleural cavity (< 1500ml)



Xray showing left sided hemothorax (yellow arrowhead) secondary to multiple rib fractures after fall from skiing (Picture courtesy: MedPix)

Pleural Space Management

- Small pneumo/hemothorax may be monitored with serial chest x-rays.
 - Usually spontaneously reabsorbs
- Chest tube required for moderate to large pneumo/hemothorax.
 - Monitor output for amount and color.
 - Monitor air leaks.
 - Assess insertion site and connections.
- Apply supplemental oxygen.

Chest Tube Insertion

Complications

- Laceration of intrathoracic and/or abdominal organs
- Pleural infection
- Damage to intercostal nerve, artery, vein
- Intercostal neuritis/neuralgia
- Incorrect tube position
- Persistent PTX



Chest Tube Management

- Chest x-ray post insertion
- Monitor chest tube output
- Provide amount of suction per physician's order
- Chest tube dressing per hospital protocol
- Evaluate effectiveness of chest tube



Troubleshooting Chest Tube

CT falls out:

- Apply dressing with pressure at end-expiration
- Ensure tight seal with tape
- Call physician immediately
- Monitor patient's condition

No drainage with continued presence of HTX

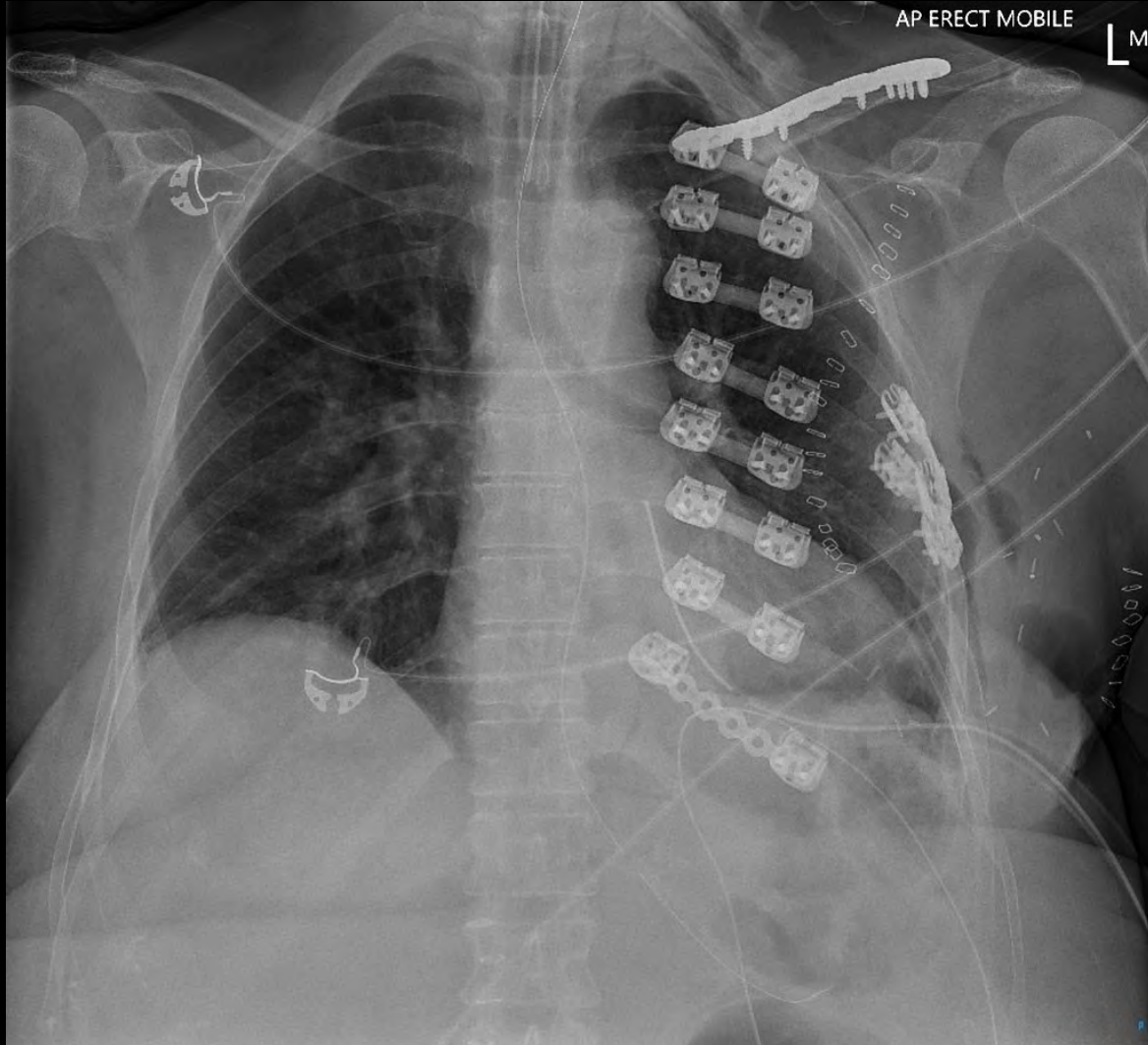
- Assess tubes for kinks, disconnection
 - Do not milk tubing
- Raise HOB and lower pleurovac
- Turn patient to affected side
- Consider patient's condition

Flail Chest

- Usually results from direct, high-energy impact
- Two or more adjacent ribs fractured at two (or more) points
- Paradoxical motion
- Labored breathing
- Ventilation and perfusion mismatch



Flail Chest



Treatment

- Humidified oxygen
- Cautious fluid resuscitation
- Intubate if respiratory distress
- Control pain
- Potential for operative fixation
 - Rib plating

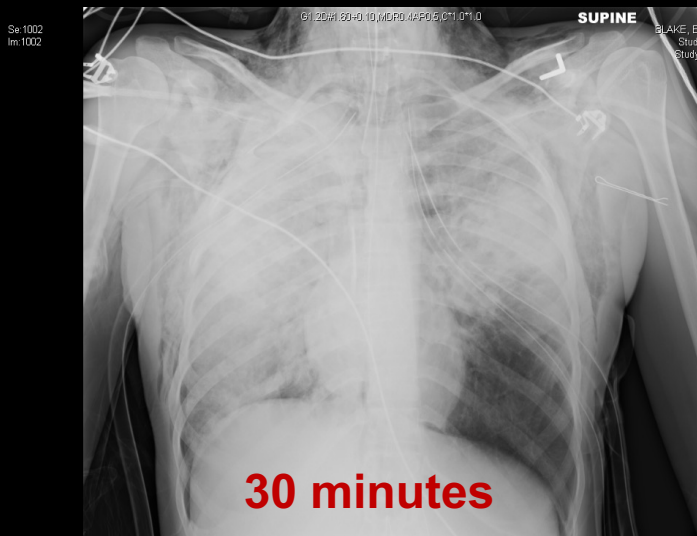
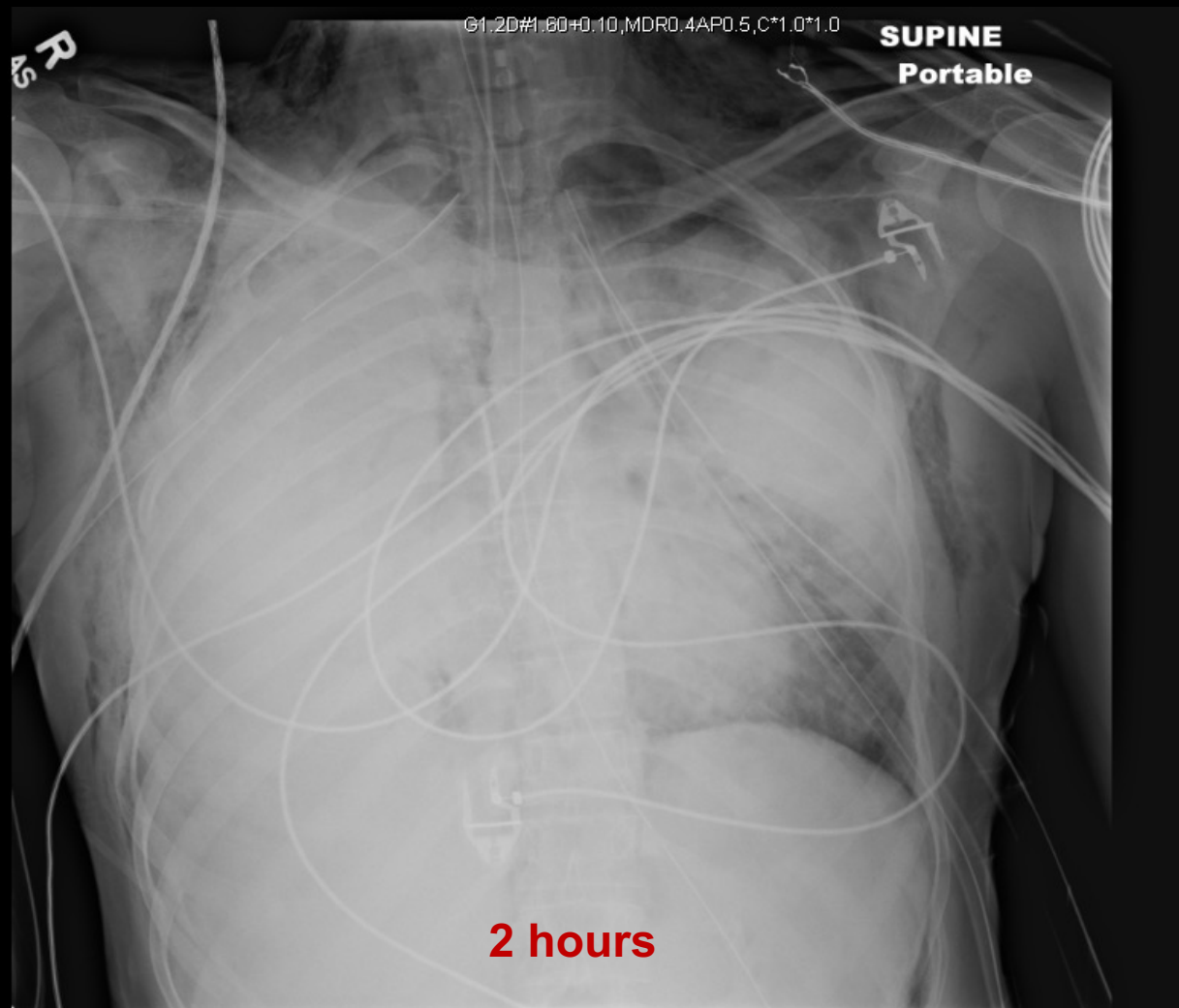
Pulmonary Contusion

- Bruising of the lung tissue
- Occurs over time following thoracic trauma
- Blood and other fluids accumulate in lung tissue
- This interferes with ventilation and leads to hypoxia.

Pulmonary Contusion



Se:1001
Im:1001



Se:1002
Im:1002

Assessment and Treatment

- Hypoxemia and respiratory compromise
- Bloody sputum, secretions
- Chest x-ray: patchy infiltrates or consolidation hours after injury
- Oxygen therapy and aggressive pulmonary toilet
- Judicious use of fluids in resuscitation
- Ventilator strategies

Blunt Cardiac Injury

- Mild tenderness to chamber rupture
- Types of injuries
 - Compression
 - Deceleration
 - Blast
 - Direct impact



Assessment

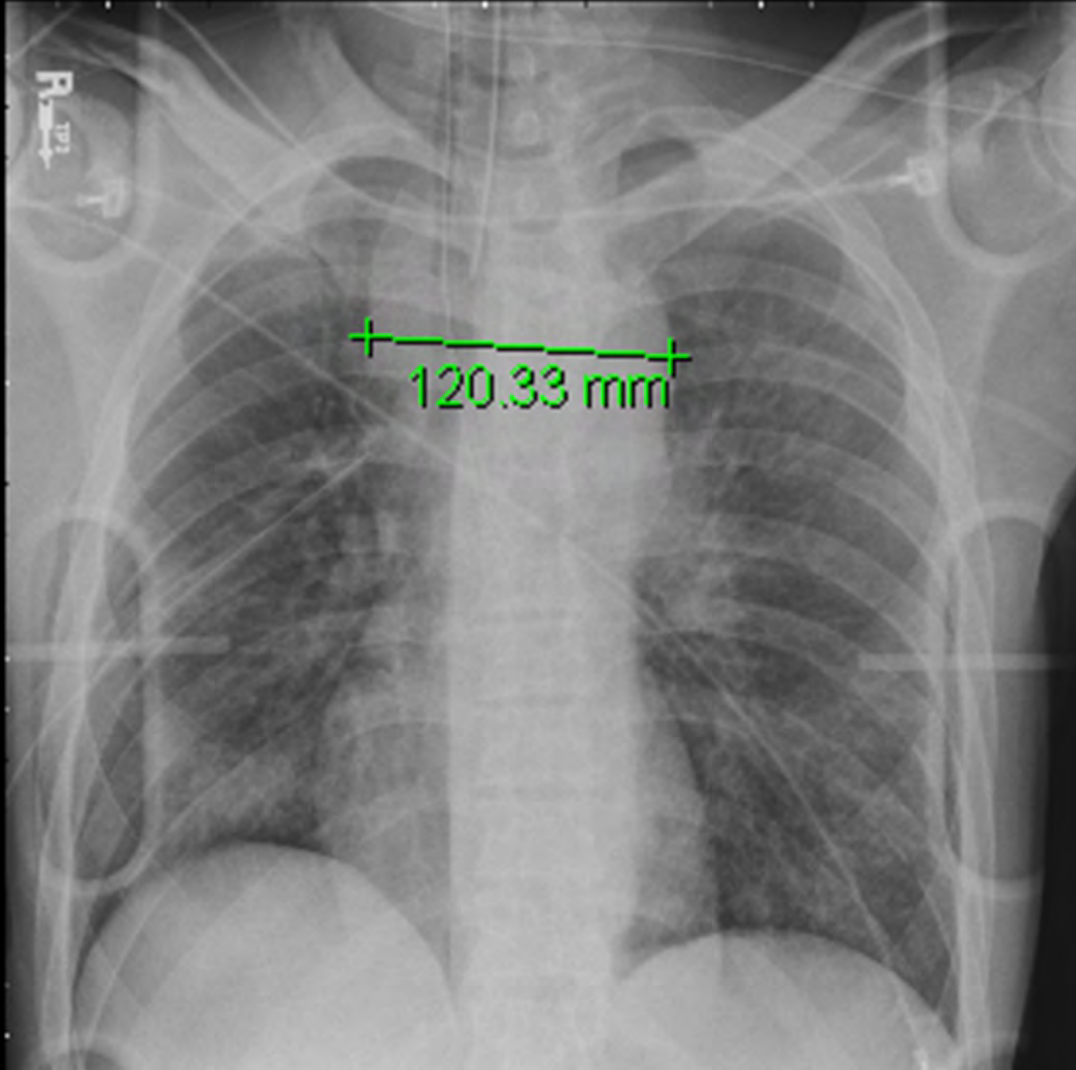
- Chest pain
- Arrhythmias
- Electrocardiogram
- Echo
- Lab panel
- Patients with changes/ abnormalities must be monitored for the first 24 hours



Traumatic Aortic Disruption

- Common cause of death at scene
- Survivors may have incomplete laceration or hematoma
- Most common site is distal to left subclavian artery
- Not always with specific symptoms
- Maintain high index of suspicion for deceleration type of injuries

Traumatic Aortic Disruption

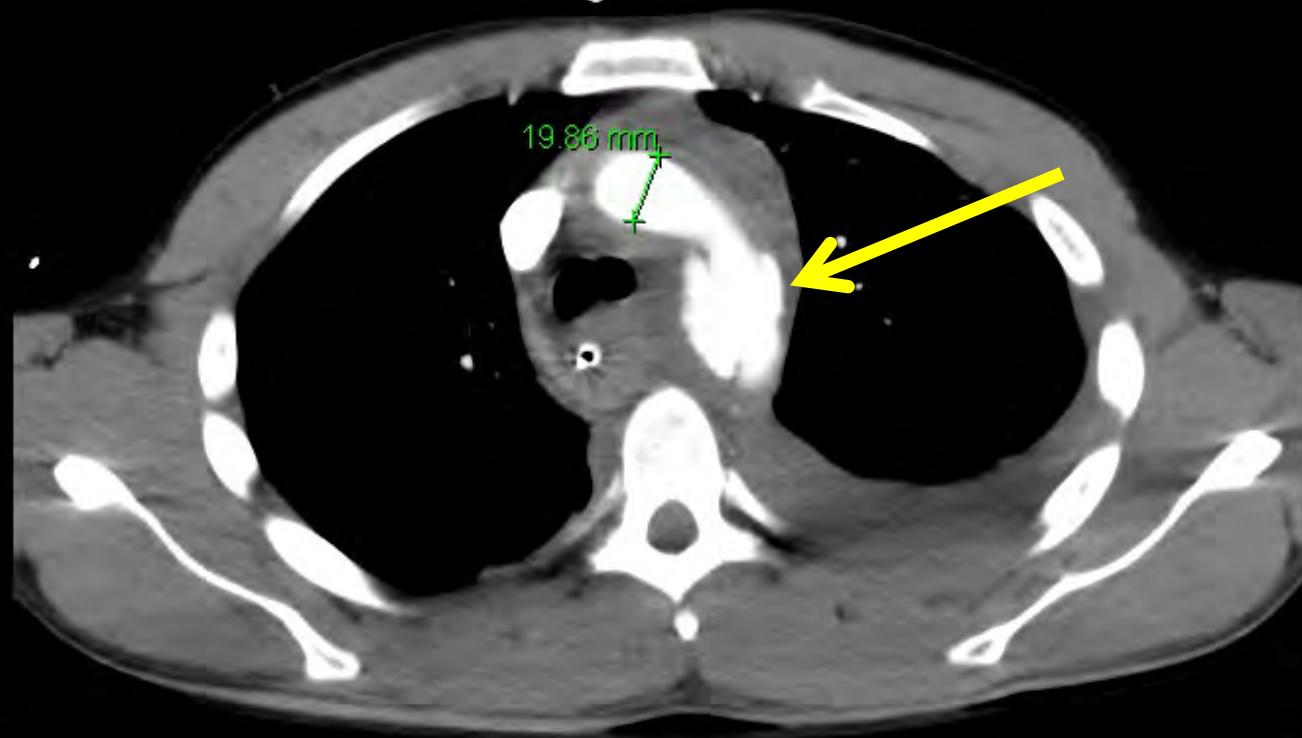


Assessment

- Patient complaints
- Clinical signs

Diagnostics

- CXR – widened mediastinum
- CT angiography
- Transesophageal echocardiography



19.86 mm

Traumatic Aortic Disruption

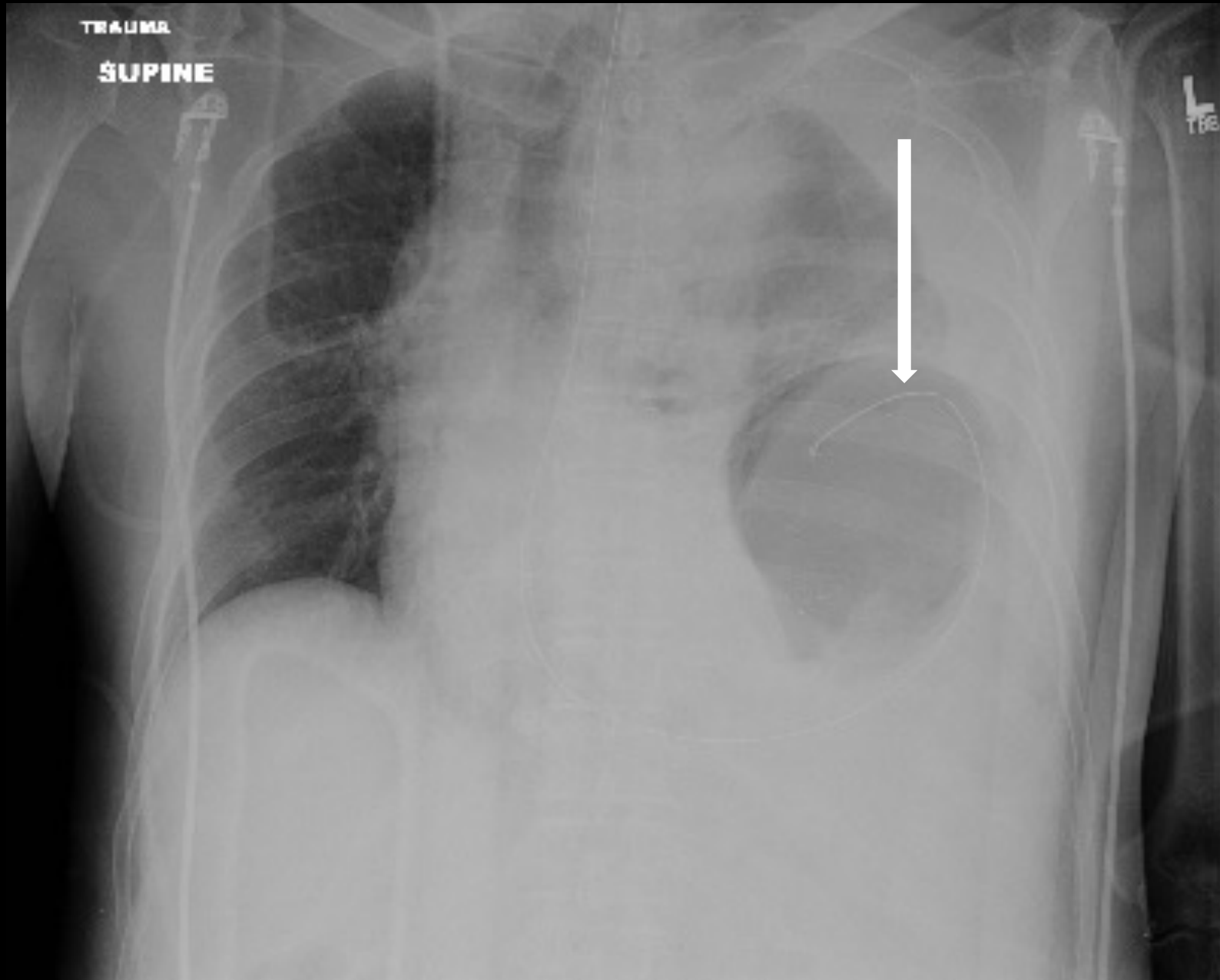
Treatment

- Heart rate and blood pressure control
 - HR < 80, MAP goal 60-70 mmHg
- Pain relief
- Open repair
- Endovascular repair
 - Most common
 - Excellent short-term outcomes



Blunt Diaphragmatic Injury

- Usually result from high-speed MVC or severe blow to abdomen
- Initial chest x-ray may be normal.
- Suggestive findings:
 - Abnormal nasogastric tube placement
 - Ipsilateral hemidiaphragm elevation
 - Abdominal visceral herniation





Rib Fractures

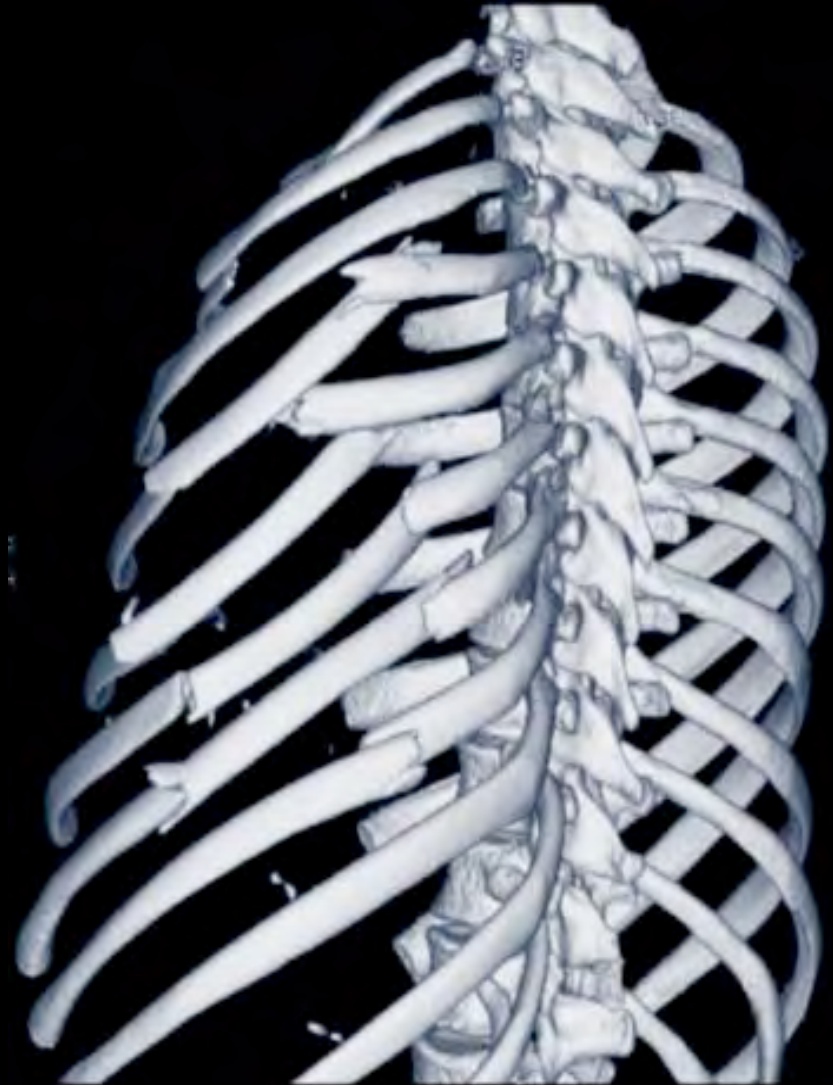
- 1st & 2nd rib fracture
 - High impact trauma
 - Suspect neck or great vessel injury
- 4th-9th rib fracture
 - Most common site of fractures
 - Suspect lung injury
- 9th-11th rib fracture
 - Suspect hepatosplenic injury



SHORTS

Clinical Challenges

- Mechanical factors
- Rib fracture motion
- Prolonged pain
- Contracture of fractured segments
- Thoracic volume loss
- Persistent pain



Rib Fractures

Triad

- Inspiratory pain
- Shallow respirations
- Retained secretions

Goal of Therapy

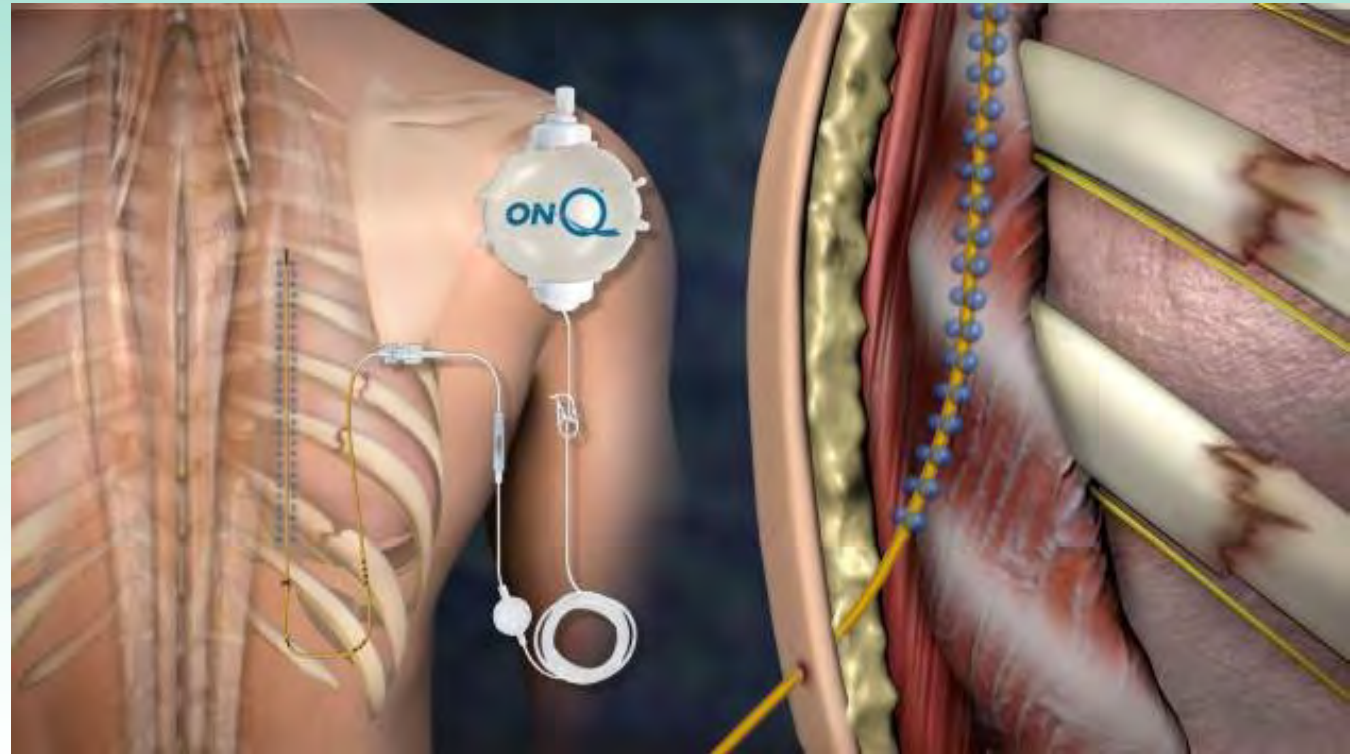
- Pain control
- Adequate pulmonary function
- Avoid potential complications



Pain Management

Options

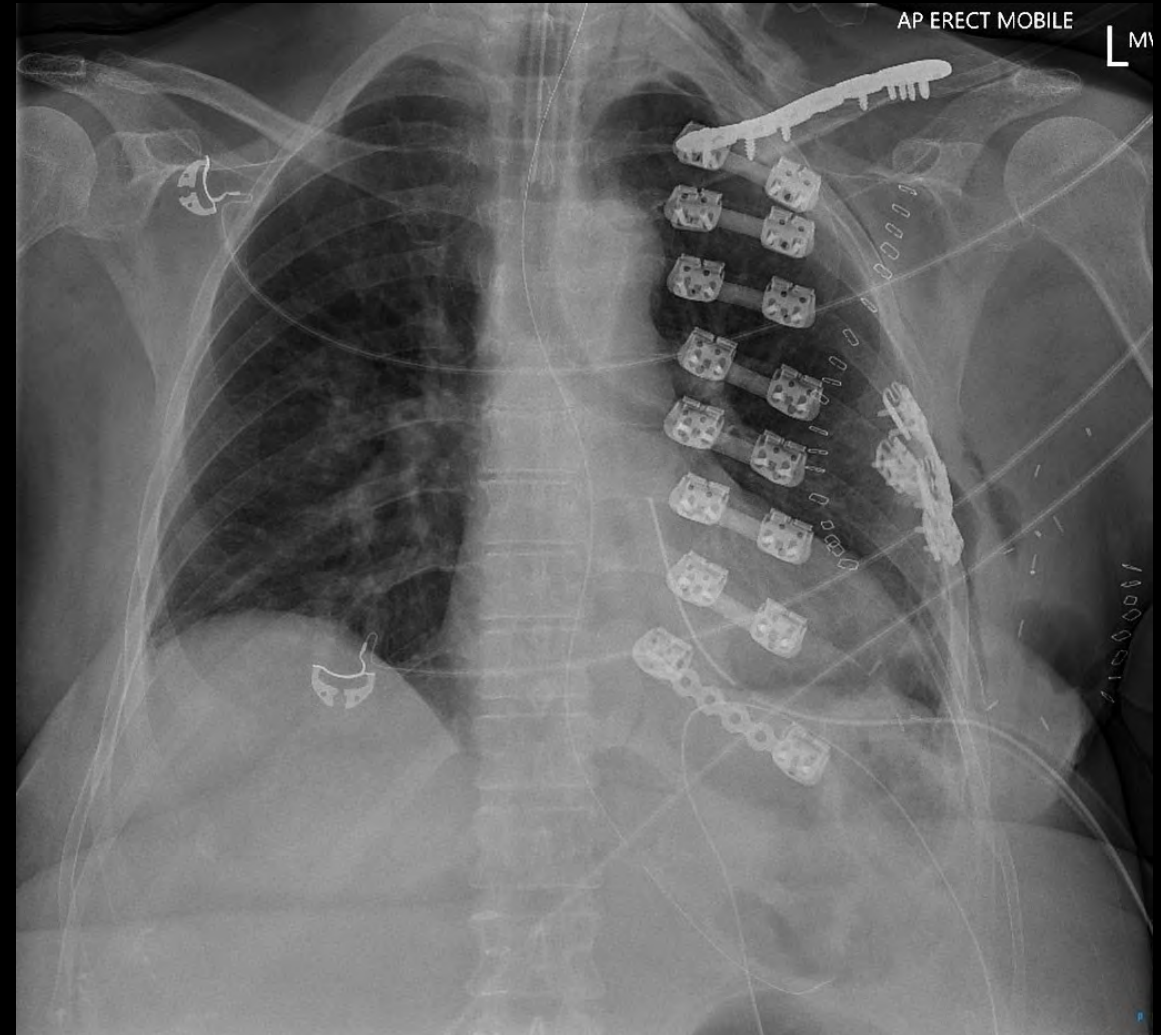
- Multi Modal Analgesia
 - Oral acetaminophen, NSAIDS
 - Oral Opioids
 - Pharm D or pain management consult
- Regional analgesia
- Operative fixation



Otto, 2016

Operative Fixation

- Reduction in pain
- Ability to reconstruct chest wall
- Restore thoracic volume
- Decreased ventilator days
- Decreased hospital LOS
- Decreased neuralgia



Subcutaneous Emphysema



- Airway injury
- Facial swelling
- Pneumothorax
- Blast injury

Traumatic Asphyxia

- Crushing force to chest
- Cyanosis of head and neck
- Subconjunctival hemorrhage
- Hemotimpanum
- Associated injuries



Scapula and Clavicle Fractures

Scapula

- Uncommon
- Clinical signs
 - Pain
 - Edema
 - Crepitus
- Management
 - Analgesia
 - Immobilization followed by PT

Clavicle

- Common
- Clinical signs
 - Tenderness
 - Crepitus
 - Deformity
- Management
 - Shoulder immobilizer
 - ORIF

Sternal Fracture

Clinical Manifestations

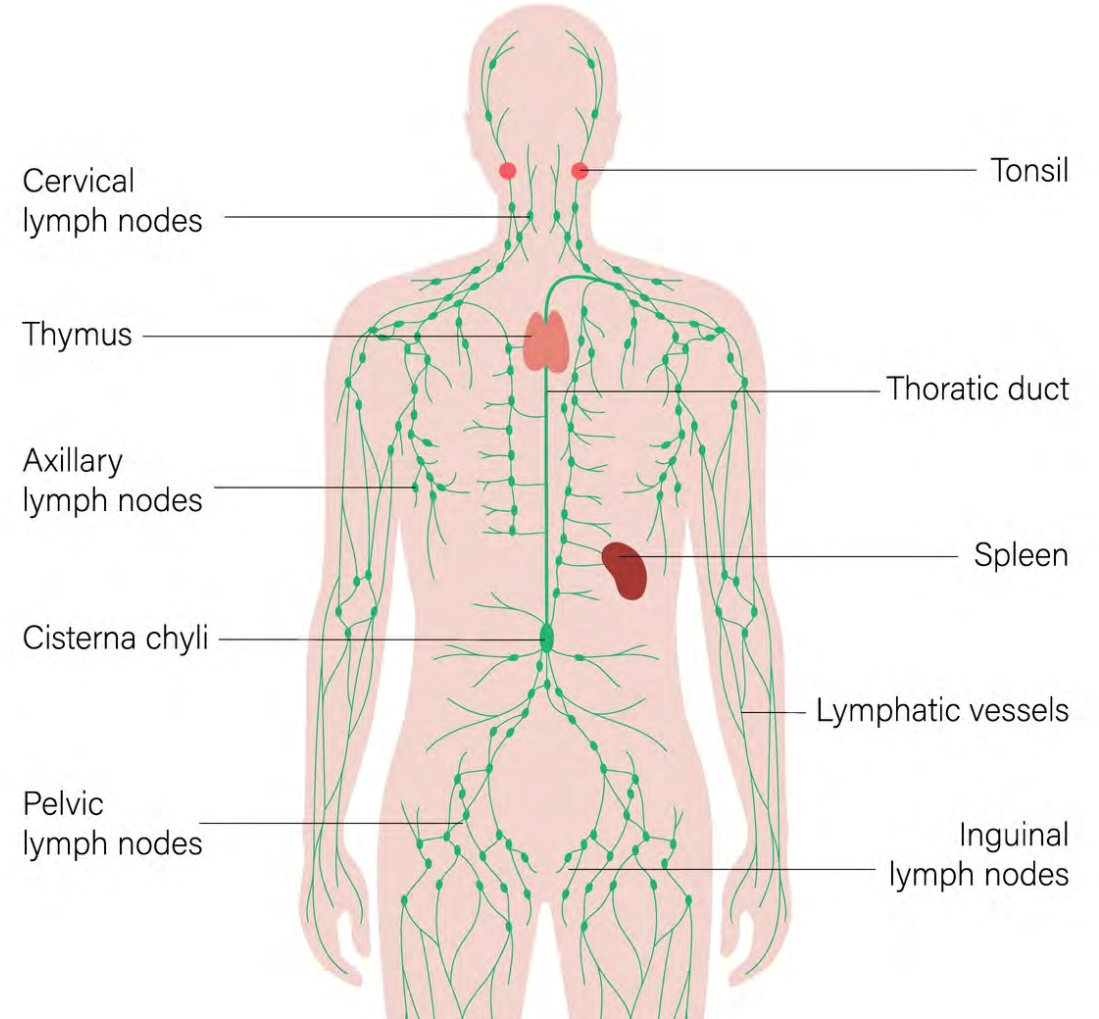
- Anterior chest pain
- Tenderness
- Palpable deformity
- Unstable fracture may result in flail chest
- ECG changes

Management

- Cardiac monitoring
- Serial ECG to rule out myocardial insult
- Echocardiogram
- Pain Control

Thoracic Duct Injury

- Uncommon
- Milky white fluid (*Chyle)
 - May be clear if patient NPO
- Chylothorax
- Continued chest tube drainage coupled with nutritional support usually results in spontaneous closure in <1 month



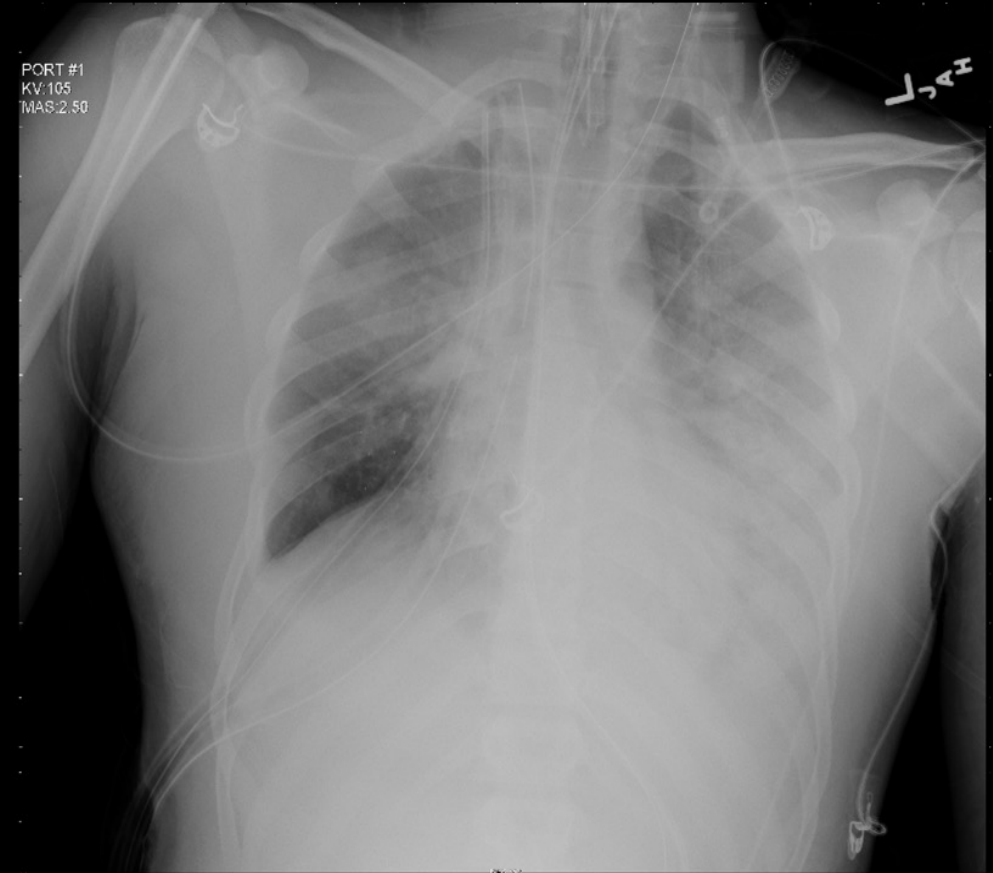
Secondary Thoracic Trauma Complications

- Respiratory Failure
 - ALI
 - ARDS
- Pneumonia
- Empyema
- Persistent Air Leak
- Pneumatocele
- Air Embolism

Acute Lung Injury (ALI) Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)

ALI/ARDS

- Acute onset of diffuse bilateral pulmonary infiltrates
- Vasculature and alveolar endothelium injured
- No evidence of hydrostatic pulmonary edema
- Severe Hypoxemia
- Treatment includes ventilatory strategies



ALI vs ARDS

- **P/F ratio ALI**
 - $\text{PaO}_2:\text{FiO}_2$ 200-300
- **P/F ratio ARDS**
 - $\text{PaO}_2:\text{FiO}_2 \leq 200$

Pneumonia

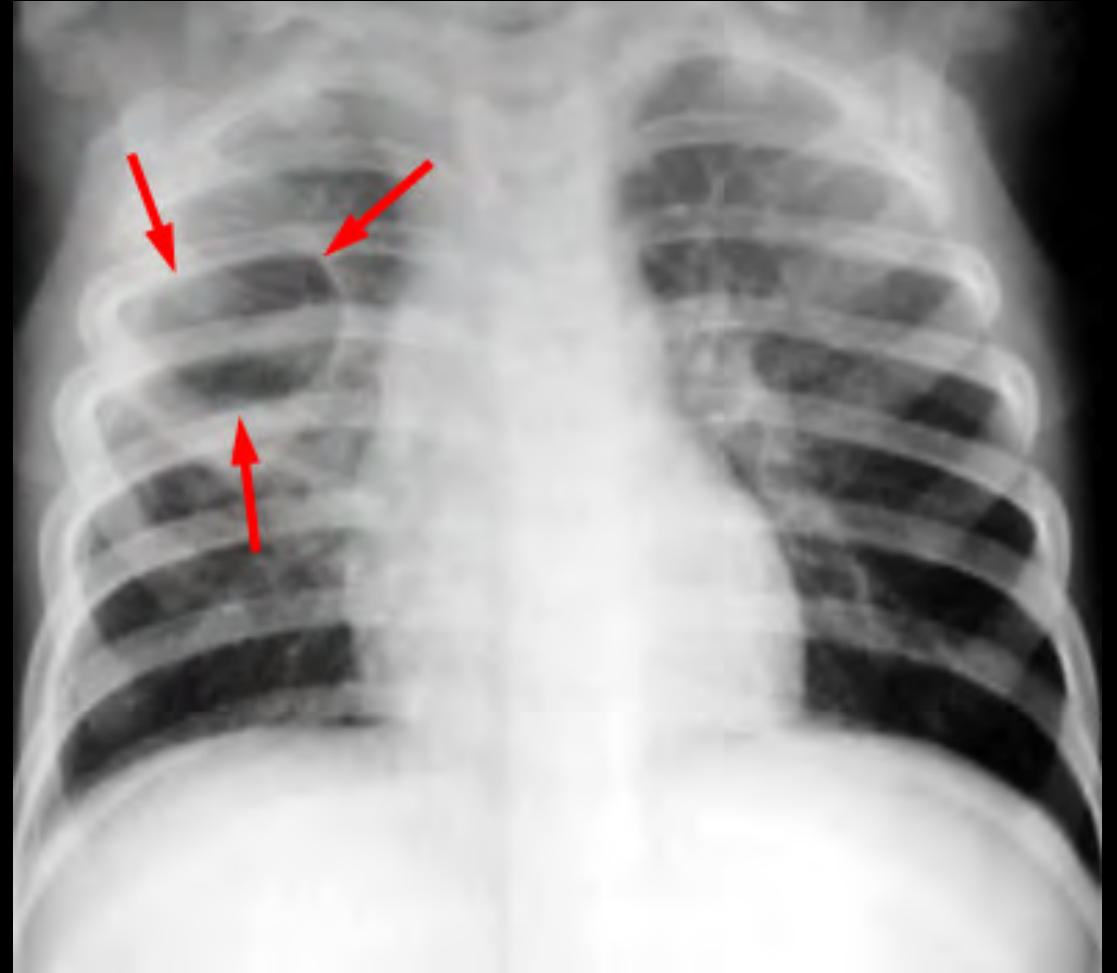
- Trauma patient susceptible particularly if they are intubated
- VAP partially iatrogenic
- Especially common in patients with ARDS
- Multiple pathogens associated with VAP
- Indiscriminate use of antibiotics
- Optimal treatment is prevention to include:
 - Hand hygiene, gowning, gloving
 - Endotracheal hygiene per protocol
 - Minimizing duration time of intubation
 - Consideration of NIPPV vs intubation

Empyema

- Risk of development remains high.
- Etiology includes inadequately drained pleural space, direct contamination from the penetrating injury or secondary infection such as a clotted HTX or diaphragm disruption.
- Suspect in chest trauma with an unexplained fever, leukocytosis or respiratory failure
- Early CT Scan if suspected
- Pathogen identification

Pneumatocele

- Air collection in lung parenchyma
- Usually develops during mechanical ventilation
- Usually resolves following weaning from ventilator
- May need CT guided drainage



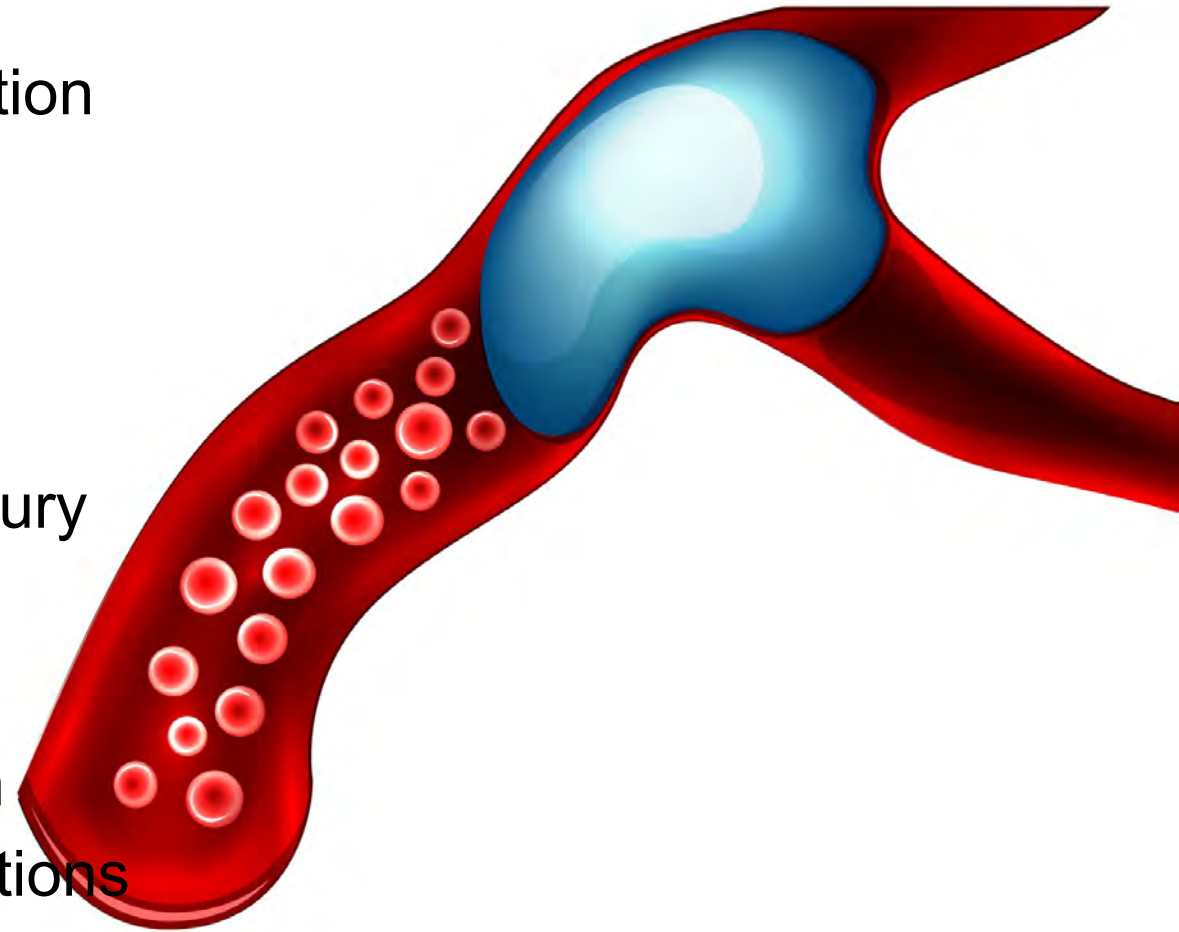
Air Embolism

Etiology

- Patient with large HTX requiring intubation with positive pressure
- Iatrogenic from central venous access procedures
- Fistula between pulmonary vein & bronchiole due to a penetrating lung injury results in systemic air embolism

Symptoms

- Sudden cardiac or cerebral dysfunction
- Air in retinal vessels and arterial aspirations
- Hemoptysis
- Seizures



Air Embolism

Treatment

- Immediately place patient in Trendelenburg position
- Rotate patient to left lateral decubitus position
- Airway management
- Immediate thoracotomy and clamping of hilum to avoid propagation of air embolus before repair of injury
- Aspiration of air from cardiac chambers, aortic root and/or right coronary artery
- Cardiac massage

Summary

- Identify and treat life-threatening injuries during primary survey.
- Maintain high level of suspicion for other injuries.
- Recognize potential complications.
- Describe treatment modalities.
- Pain management is integral to positive outcomes.

Thoracic Trauma

1. Which injuries are considered life-threatening, requiring immediate intervention?
 - a. Tension pneumothorax and pericardial tamponade
 - b. Cardiac contusion and rib fractures
 - c. Clavicle fracture and pulmonary contusion
 - d. Pneumomediastinum and subcutaneous emphysema
2. What is an early sign of tension pneumothorax?
 - a. Tracheal deviation
 - b. Respiratory distress
 - c. Increased cardiac output
 - d. Epistaxis
3. What is the immediate management of tension pneumothorax?
 - a. Chest tube placement in 7th intercostal space
 - b. Place a three-sided dressing over chest tube site
 - c. Needle decompression in the 4th or 5th intercostal space mid-axillary line
 - d. ED thoracotomy
4. Flail chest is defined as:
 - a. Multiple rib fractures with subsequent subcutaneous emphysema
 - b. Chyle in the pleural space
 - c. Excess fluid in pericardium
 - d. Two or more ribs fractured at two or more points, and subsequent paradoxical motion
5. Which patient would benefit most from an emergent thoracotomy?
 - a. 48 year-old patient with gunshot wound to the back who lost vital signs upon arrival to the ED
 - b. 12 year-old patient with traumatic asphyxia with CPR in progress for past 15 minutes prior to arrival to the ED
 - c. 16 year-old patient with significant trauma to head, GCS 4 on scene, intubated and CPR for past 5 minutes by prehospital providers
 - d. 19 year-old patient with stab wound to chest who is dropped at Triage by friends, with fixed and dilated pupils
6. A nasogastric tube was inserted in a trauma patient. A follow-up chest radiograph shows abdominal contents in the chest cavity. The nurse should be suspicious of:
 - a. Diaphragmatic rupture
 - b. Chylothorax
 - c. Pleural effusion
 - d. Tension pneumothorax

7. What is the most appropriate immediate nursing intervention for a patient who has pulled out their chest tube?

- a. Restrain patient and place bed in Trendelenburg position.
- b. Cover site with a dressing and contact the physician
- c. Apply oxygen per face mask and order chest x-ray
- d. Monitor for air leaks and report subcutaneous emphysema

8. What is the goal of treatment in patients with rib fractures?

- a. Maintain pulmonary function and relieve pain
- b. Monitoring supplemental oxygen
- c. Application of sequential stockings
- d. Administering cough suppressant medication

9. What is the most common medical intervention required for patients with thoracic trauma?

- a. Chest tube insertion
- b. Thoracotomy
- c. VATS (video-assisted thoracoscopic surgery)
- d. Pericardiocentesis

10. Three days post motor vehicle crash, a patient was started on a regular diet. The nurse noticed the patient's chest tube drainage changed from serous-sanguineous to milky white. The physician orders for the fluid to be sent for triglyceride and chylomicron levels. The nurse suspects the patient may have:

- a. Thoracic duct injury with chylothorax
- b. Pulmonary contusion with empyema
- c. Retained hemothorax with interstitial bleeding
- d. Persistent air leak with pneumatocele

Thoracic Trauma

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5. Which patient would benefit most from an emergent thoracotomy?
 - a. 48 year-old patient with gunshot wound to the back who lost vital signs upon arrival to the ED**
 - b. 12 year-old patient with traumatic asphyxia with CPR in progress for past 15 minutes prior to arrival to the ED
 - c. 16 year-old patient with significant trauma to head, GCS 4 on scene, intubated and CPR for past 5 minutes by prehospital providers
 - d. 19 year-old patient with stab wound to chest who is dropped at Triage by friends, with fixed and dilated pupils
6. A nasogastric tube was inserted in a trauma patient. A follow-up chest radiograph shows abdominal contents in the chest cavity. The nurse should be suspicious of:
 - a. Diaphragmatic rupture**
 - b. Chylothorax
 - c. Pleural effusion
 - d. Tension pneumothorax

7. What is the most appropriate immediate nursing intervention for a patient who has pulled out their chest tube?

- a. Restrain patient and place bed in Trendelenburg position.
- b. Cover site with a dressing and contact the physician**
- c. Apply oxygen per face mask and order chest x-ray
- d. Monitor for air leaks and report subcutaneous emphysema

8. What is the goal of treatment in patients with rib fractures?

- a. Maintain pulmonary function and relieve pain**
- b. Monitoring supplemental oxygen
- c. Application of sequential stockings
- d. Administering cough suppressant medication

9. What is the most common medical intervention required for patients with thoracic trauma?

- a. Chest tube insertion**
- b. Thoracotomy
- c. VATS (video-assisted thoracoscopic surgery)
- d. Pericardiocentesis

10. Three days post motor vehicle crash, a patient was started on a regular diet. The nurse noticed the patient's chest tube drainage changed from serous-sanguineous to milky white. The physician orders for the fluid to be sent for triglyceride and chylomicron levels. The nurse suspects the patient may have:

- a. Thoracic duct injury with chylothorax**
- b. Pulmonary contusion with empyema
- c. Retained hemothorax with interstitial bleeding
- d. Persistent air leak with pneumatocele

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