Chipped Rail Gear of a Lightwand Device: A Potential Complication of Tracheal Intubation

To the Editor—A 70-yr-old woman undergoing back surgery was intubated without difficulty using the light-guided Trachlight lightwand device (Laerdal Medical, Stavanger, Norway), which we use for routine intubations in our operating room. She was then placed in a prone position, with her head held with a ProneView® Protective Helmet System (Dupaco, Oceanside, CA). A gastric tube was placed transorally. At the end of the operation, we found a white, 2-mm³, plastic fragment on the tip of her tongue, which the anesthesiologist (K.H.) set aside and kept pending clarification of its origin. At the conclusion of the operation, the patient was extubated uneventfully and was transferred to a general ward. Nearly 1 h later, the foreign body was identified as being a chipped rail gear from the Trachlight device (fig. 1). Because the radiodensity of the fragment was approximately 80 Hounsfield units, very near that of fat (~120 units), the detection of other fragments by computed tomography scanning seemed highly unlikely, regardless of their possible location. After close observation for 7 days, the patient was discharged from the hospital without apparent complication, and has been followed for 3 months without the development of adverse health events.

The lightwand device is a useful tool for a variety of situations, such as difficult or nasal intubations, in patients with facial or cervical fractures, or for intubations in presence of bleeding in the oral cavity.1–3 However, it has also been associated with complications, including heat trauma, and increased rates of sore throat, hoarseness, mucosal bleeding, dental trauma, and malposition of the epiglottis.4 The Trachlight is a light and handy instrument made of plastic. Although the manufacturer disallows the reuse of the wand, it has set no time limit on the reuse of the handle. It is recommended that the device be cleaned daily with 70% alcohol. It is recommended that the device be cleaned daily with 70% alcohol. A handy instrument made of plastic. Although the manufacturer disallows the reuse of the wand, it has set no time limit on the reuse of the handle. It is recommended that the device be cleaned daily with 70% alcohol. A handy instrument made of plastic. Although the manufacturer disallows the reuse of the wand, it has set no time limit on the reuse of the handle. It is recommended that the device be cleaned daily with 70% alcohol.

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Fig. 1. (A) Trachlight lightwand device (Laerdal Medical, Stavanger, Norway) with endotracheal tube. (B) Trachlight handle and fragmented part of the handle rail gear. Two teeth are missing from the distal handle (double black arrows). The arrowhead points to the retrieved rail gear fragment.