

New Eye Condition Linked to Heart Attack Treatment

A team of Japanese researchers have found a new abnormality of the retina that can occur in patients who have undergone angioplasty or stenting to treat a heart attack.

The problem does not seem to need treatment and appears to clear up spontaneously within a few weeks after the heart procedure.

Dr. M. Kawakami and colleagues, from Jichi Medical School in Saitama, first became aware of the condition in a heart attack patient whose blocked coronary artery had been cleared with a balloon catheter and a propped open with a stent. They noticed this patient had "cotton wool" spots around his retina and this led the researchers to examine the retinas of similar patients.

The study reported in the British Journal of Ophthalmology screened 40 patients. Of these, 30 had been treated for a heart attack and 10 for stable chest pain. For each patient, eye exams began three days after their procedures and continued for up to three months.

Results showed that 17 of the heart attack patients developed the eye condition, with "cotton wool" spots most apparent from 1 to 2 months. Superficial bleeding in the retina was also reported in seven of the patients with the eye condition. None of the patients with stable chest pain were found to have the abnormality.

In most patients with the eye condition it did not impair their vision but four of them did experience blurred or distorted vision. The condition generally subsided after a few weeks, but in six patients it persisted for more than 3 months before resolving.

Although the condition is benign and self limiting the researchers say that doctors need to be aware it can occur in heart attack patients after they've been treated. Understanding the condition means patients and doctors can be informed about its progression.

SOURCE: British Journal of Ophthalmology, April 2004.