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Penetrating cue stick injury through the orbit: a modern take on Phineas Gage

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A 34-year-old man, who had severe epilepsy and learning difficulties, was playing snooker. He had a witnessed drop attack, causing the snooker cue to pierce through the top of his right eyelid. The cue stick spontaneously came out of his eyelid as he fell.

A computed tomography scan of his brain revealed a focal fracture through the right orbital roof, with some intracranial air and no haemorrhage (Figure 1).

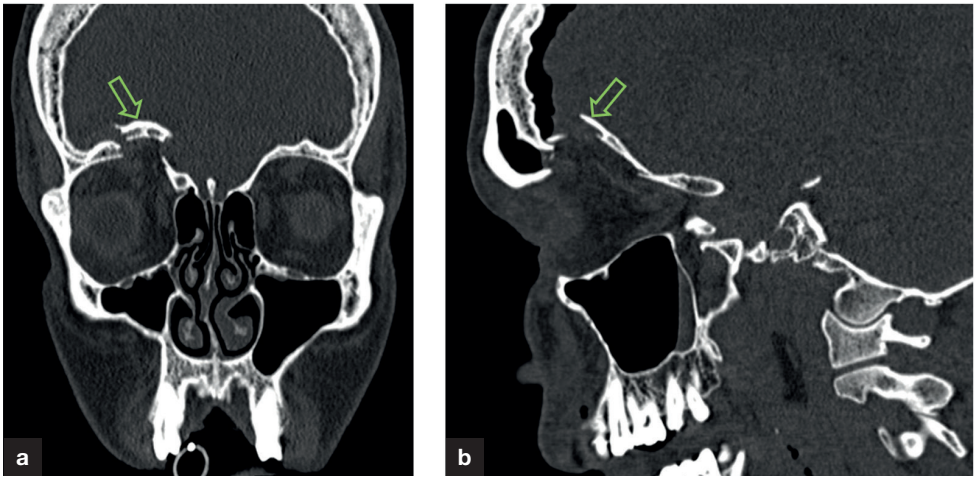

Figure 1. a. Coronal and (b) sagittal computed tomography scans of brain, showing fracture through the orbital roof, with the free fragment indicated by the arrow. There is a small amount of intracranial air in the frontal region with no major intracranial bleed.

Allowing for his learning difficulties, he had a good range of eye movements and stable vision bilaterally. His injuries were managed conservatively, with a course of prophylactic augmentin. He made an uneventful recovery with no new neurological deficits. He remained well at 18-month follow up.

Penetrating intra-orbital injuries of the type sustained by this patient typically injure the orbit. If the instrument passes through the thin orbital roof, this can injure the frontal lobe, with long-term cognitive sequelae (Damasio et al, 1994; van Duinen, 2012). The archetypal case illustrating this was the infamous Phineas Gage who, at 24 years of age, survived an accident in which a large iron rod was driven through his frontal skull, destroying his frontal lobe and leaving him with long-term personality and behavioural changes.

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