Lethal Sepsis Due to Traditional Healing

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An 18-year-old girl was brought to the emergency unit of the Kalafong Hospital in Pretoria, South Africa. Twenty-four hours earlier she had been treated by a nonmedical healer in her village with intrauterine injections of a fluid derived from the stools of pregnant cows, the intention of which was to restore her fertility. Soon afterwards, she developed increasing lower abdominal pains and fainted. At admission, the girl already had a septic abdomen and was in severe shock. She was promptly taken to the operating theatre for an urgent laparotomy. The abdominal cavity was full of blood and pus (A). After the abdomen had been cleaned and rinsed, a perforation 0.6 cm wide was discovered in the uterine fundus (B). The patient died of intractable hypotension while still on the operating table. The case demonstrates that dangerous, exotic healing techniques still prevail in some parts of the world, and that modern medicine may lose the battle here. © 2000 Wiley-Liss, Inc.