

**2019 ACMT Annual Scientific Meeting
Open Mic Competition**

Title: The Strangler

Presenter: Charlotte Goldfine, MD, First year Fellow, University of Massachusetts Medical School

Abstract: A 13 year old male becomes unresponsive at a party. After taking a sip of a drink, he suddenly felt short of breath. He fell to the ground coughing and gasping for breath. He started foaming at the mouth. Blood streamed from his nose and mouth as his face became cyanotic. He stopped breathing and died. This is the death of King Joffrey Baratheon in the Game of Thrones series. His death was the result of a poison, called the strangler.

Although this poison is fictional, there are several real-life toxins that could explain his death. The most prominent symptom is respiratory distress with a very rapid onset. Given these symptoms, the differential diagnosis includes an inhibitor of oxidative phosphorylation, such as cyanide. Other etiologies include strychnine and poison hemlock.

Joffrey is not the only character in Game of Thrones to die in this manner. One character killed her husband with a poison called tears of Lys which “eats at a man’s bowels”, similar to a caustic ingestion. Another character is murdered after she is kissed on the lips; she bled to death as can be seen with a superwarfarin or viperidae venom. Her murderer evaded any effects of the poison by ingesting an antidote afterwards. The books detail intricate plots as characters vie for power, leading many to turn to unique poisons as a way to kill their enemies. As fiction is often an exaggeration of reality, there are possible real-life explanations of these poisonings.

Objective 1. Perform a differential diagnosis for the poisoning of Joffrey Baratheon

Objective 2. Discuss other poisoning presentations throughout the Game of Thrones series

Objective 3. Understand possible real etiologies of fictional poisons and dispel myths associated with their depiction