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Difficult Airway in a Patient With Tracheal Stenosis

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INTRODUCTION
Trumatic intubations can pose as unforeseen challenges in subsequent operations. We present a case whereby even with prior planning and anticipation, we were unable to secure an airway with an ETT. We needed to wake the patient up and revisit the operation after intervention.

CASE DESCRIPTION
A 51 year old female with known tracheal stenosis secondary to prior traumatic emergent intubation presented for CABG with triple vessel disease.

During asleep fiberoptic intubation an abnormal soft tissue web-like structure was noticed in the right lateral trachea at 18 cm from incisor level. Following an unsuccessful attempted intubation with 6.0 size tube, an LMA was placed and patient was awakened.

In a separate setting, an asleep fiberoptic airway evaluation showed 7-10 mm long tracheal stenosis beginning 3.5 cm distal to the vocal cords. This stenosis required balloon dilation and the procedure was performed with a properly positioned LMA and total intravenous anesthetic technique.

CONCLUSION
Previous traumatic intubations or history of tracheal stenosis can present as challenges in airway securement due to tracheal web formations.

It might be prudent to place the ETT under direct visual guidance after a bronchoscopy and balloon dilation of tracheal stenosis.

DISCUSSION
Unanticipated tracheal stenosis will present as the inability to advance the endotracheal tube past the stenotic lesion. At times, a smaller ETT may be able to be advanced past the stenotic lesion.

The insertion of a laryngeal mask airway may provide adequate airway management if difficulty presents with ETT placement as highlighted in the difficult airway algorithm. In addition, an LMA can be used as a conduit for a flexible fiberoptic bronchoscope to visualize the stenotic lesion. 1, 2

REFERENCES
2. Campo SL, Demman WT. The laryngeal mask airway: its role in the difficult airway.