Weed Wacker Safety Fatality File

A 14-year old boy was standing approximately 15 feet away from his father who was using a weed-wacker to trim his lawn at home. The boy suddenly felt something hit him in the left antecubital fossa, noticed no bruising or bleeding and thought nothing of it.

After a 2-week period he observed a swelling in the antecubital fossa which was tender and erythematous. He was referred to the paediatric orthopaedic unit on duty where a diagnosis of cellulitis was made and a week of outpatient oral antibiotic treatment was administered. The swelling and pain increased and he returned to Hospital, where a plain radiograph and CT angiogram revealed a metallic foreign body lodged in the antecubital fossa resulting in a false aneurysm of the brachial artery and absent radial pulse.

A weed-wacker is a novel rotatory mechanical device used quite commonly worldwide for cutting grass and keeping lawns well manicured. This is an unfortunate case of penetrating missile injury from use of a weedwacker, whereby a bystander was hit with a piece of steel wire projected to the antecubital fossa. Interestingly, the patient did not realize that a foreign object had entered since it occurred so quickly, inadvertently and with such high velocity. Additionally, the Orthopaedic team seeing patient assumed this to be a simple case of cellulitis before radiographs and ultrasound investigations were requested.