MJA Christmas Competition

Whirl sign — a hurricane on a weather map

An 82-year-old man presented to the emergency department with abdominal pain and vomiting. An abdominal computed tomography scan showed a whirl sign around the superior mesenteric vessels (Figure, arrow), suggestive of small bowel volvulus. A whirl is formed by the afferent and efferent loops of the volvulus, with the central portion consisting of tightly twisted bowel and mesentery.[1] The latter create swirling strands of soft tissue shadow within a background of mesenteric fat attenuation, giving the appearance of a hurricane on a weather map. Caecal and sigmoid volvulus can also give rise to whirl signs. Laparotomy confirmed mid-gut volvulus with 360° rotation. The patient had an uneventful recovery following derotation of the mesentery.

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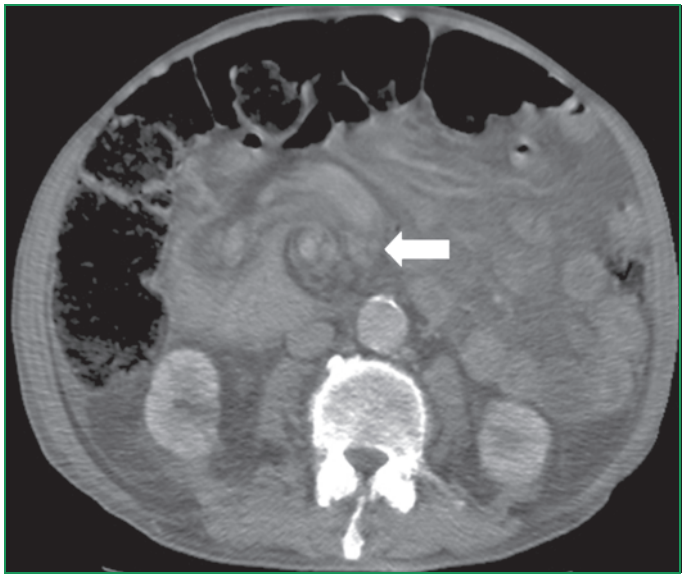
1 Loh YH, Dunn GD. Computed tomography features of small bowel volvulus. *Australas Radiol* 2000; 44: 464-467. ❑