Ankle Reflexes

**Narrative Section**

**HISTORICAL VIGNETTE** - Did you know that the reflex hammer’s history is rooted in wine? The story of the reflex hammer dates back to 1761 when Josef Leopold Auenbrugger first described the art of percussion adapted from his father’s method of tapping wine casks to measure the level of remaining wine. Percussion was initially performed with a hammer, but it fell out of use when the fingers were used as pleximeter and hammer. The hammer would later be adapted by physicians for the deep tendon reflexes when Erb and Westhal described the diagnostic utility of the knee-jerk reflex, about 1875.

**CLINICAL VIGNETTE AND USEFULNESS** - Mr. Jones presented with progressive weakness in both legs and arms. The examination showed bilateral weakness in all 4 extremities. There was normal sensation below the clavicle, normal cranial nerves, and normal mentation. Deep tendon reflexes were very brisk, and there was ankle and patellar clonus. The Babinski and Hoffman reflexes were present with 3+ reflexes in all 4 extremities. The distinct constellation of findings suggested a transverse cord lesion. The differential would have been different had the reflexes been normal or absent.

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