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Incidence and Size of Patent Foramen Ovale During the First 10 Decades of Life: An Autopsy Study of 965 Normal Hearts

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The incidence and size of the patent foramen ovale were studied in 965 autopsy specimens of human hearts, which were from subjects who were evenly distributed by sex and age. Neither incidence nor size of the defect was significantly different between male and female subjects. The overall incidence was 27.3%, but it progressively declined with increasing age from 34.3% during the first three decades of life to 25.4% during the 4th through 8th decades and to 20.2% during the 9th and 10th decades. Among the 263 specimens that exhibited patency in our study, the foramen ovale ranged from 1 to 19 mm in maximal potential diameter (mean, 4.9 mm). In 98% of these cases, the foramen ovale was 1 to 10 mm in diameter. The size tended to increase with increasing age, from a mean of 3.4 mm in the first decade to 5.8 mm in the 10th decade of life.



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