Appendicitis is a common surgical emergency with over 270,000 appendectomies performed in the United States each year. There are many post-operative complications from laparoscopic surgery that emergency physicians may be prone to dismiss due to the prevalence and less invasive nature of the procedure. This unique case highlights the importance of keeping the possibility of infection of remnants as well as the rarer occurrence of retained surgical specimens in the differentials for abdominal pain patients.

Two rare complications of appendectomy are stump appendicitis and retained appendicoliths. Patients may present hours to years after surgery. Stump appendicitis is caused by a retained appendicular stump and presents similar to appendicitis, although is not usually considered in the differential diagnosis as patients report a history of a prior appendectomy. Treatment requires surgery to remove the remnant of the appendiceal base. An appendicolith is a collection of fecal debris and calcium salts residing in the appendix that can lead to acute appendicitis. Appendicoliths can be retained secondary to rupture of the appendix prior to surgery or from failure of their removal during surgery. Management of retained fecaliths requires drainage of the abscess and surgical removal.

As emergency physicians, it is crucial to include these rare surgical complications in the differentials, alongside the more common pathologies when approaching and treating the patients with abdominal pain.

References: