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Preventing Ambient Light from Affecting Pulse Oximetry

To the Editor:—The photodetectors in flexible pulse oximeter probes are unable to discriminate between ambient light and the light produced by the light emitting diodes. The interference of ambient light—for example, surgical lights or heating lamps—with pulse oximetry monitoring in the operating room has been described.¹ One solution is to cover the probe site with

some opaque material, such as a surgical towel. Although this approach is generally useful, with active neonates or restless patients, the towel frequently becomes displaced and exposes the oximeter probe.

We would like to describe a simple, effective remedy to this problem; that is, covering the probe, while it is attached to a digit, with the packaging from an alcohol swab. This packaging is lined with metallic foil and, thus, is opaque and malleable. Also, the packaging is manufactured in a shape that makes a convenient, dark receptacle for a digit, even one on which a flexible pulse oximeter probe has been placed (fig. 1).



FIG. 1. A pulse oximeter probe is protected from ambient light by means of the packaging originally used for alcohol swabs.

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A Method of Securing the Stethoscope Head

To the Editor:—Few would deny that the oldest and simplest transducer used in anesthesiology, the precordial stethoscope, is still one of the best. Its only defect, in my experience, is its vulnerability to dislodgment by the efforts of the surgical team, despite many tricks to prevent this.

In prepubertal children where the musculature of the chest wall has not reached its adult development, an alternative site for the stethoscope head is in the left axilla where it is protected from such displacement. By trial and error, it is almost always possible to adequately hear both breath and heart sounds.