Preventing Delivery of Hypoxic Gas Mixtures

To the Editor:—The letter published by Richards
reports yet another way that the chain proportioning device coupling Modulus® flow control valves can fail with the possibility of delivering hypoxic gas mixtures; there are doubtless many more to report.

Of greater concern is the way in which the failure was discovered. This practice of depending on the device to increase oxygen flow while the operator increases nitrous oxide flow is one against which I have already commented in ANESTHESIOLOGY. To use an extreme example, what if some calamity befell the anesthesiologist before the failure of the proportioning device was noticed. In such a case, the oxygen flow rate would not be increased and thus a “self-created” hazardous situation would not be corrected.

Safety devices are perhaps misnamed if they lead us into habits revealed as unsafe when the devices fail. Safe technique uses devices only as back ups against the inevitable danger of operator error.

Anesthesiology
72:775, 1990

In Reply—Dr. Herbst misconstrued my description of in-use evaluation of a safety function of an anesthesia machine. My use of the proportioning device is founded on the expectation, not the assumption, of an increase in oxygen flow. This safety device malfunction would lurk undetected in the face of prim adherence to a ranked sequence of flow control knob manipulation. Safe technique includes assessment of back-up devices in recognition of the multifactorial nature of anesthetic mishaps. It is incongruous to recommend reliance upon safety devices only at the inopportune moment of operator error.

Charles H. Richards, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
Pain Evaluation and Treatment Institute

Anesthesiology
72:775–776, 1990

Ventricular Tachycardia Associated with Injection of Prostaglandin F2α into the Uterine Cervix during Anesthesia

To the Editor—The use of prostaglandin F2α to control postpartum hemorrhage due to uterine atony resistant to usual medical management has been found to be effective and generally safe. We report a case in which injection of prostaglandin F2α into the uterine cervix during anesthesia resulted in life-threatening ventricular tachycardia that resolved by appropriate management.

CASE REPORT

A healthy, 30-yr-old, 64-kg woman presented with vaginal bleeding 1 week after spontaneous delivery. Upon examination, an enlarged uterus the size of 12 gestational weeks was found. Ultrasound examination revealed a suspected retained placenta. Her history included an uneventful dilatation and curettage under general anesthesia 3 yr earlier during which oxytocin and methylergonovine had been administered without untoward effects. There was no history of cardiac disease. In the operating room, blood pressure was 130/80 mmHg and heart rate was 86 beats per min. Anesthesia was induced with methohexital (1.5 mg/kg) and fentanyl 0.1 mg, and maintained using small incremental doses (10–20 mg) of methohexital as needed. The trachea was not intubated and the patient spontaneously breathed a 66/33 N2O/O2 mixture. The blood pressure was 110/70 mmHg and the pulse was 86 beats per min. Cervical dilatation was unnecessary and during curettage placental residua were evacuated. The uterus

Timothy J. Herbst, M.D.
Department of Anesthesiology
Washington University School of Medicine, Box 8054
660 South Euclid Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63110

References

(Accepted for publication January 22, 1990.)

Center for Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation
Baum Boulevard at Craig Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213

References

(Accepted for publication January 22, 1990.)