we have received inquiries from the anesthesia community regarding the use of the PB240 pulse oximetry option with Nellcor® brand sensors. Puritan-Bennett was among the first companies to recognize Nellcor’s expertise in sensor technology and execute a license agreement to use these sensors. In order to avoid confusion we chose not to participate in Nellcor’s advertisement because Puritan-Bennett also markets an intensive care unit ventilator that uses pulse oximetry technology from Ohmeda.

We recognize the potential problems that have been raised and clearly state a warning on all oximeter cables and operator’s manuals to use only Nellcor® probes. It is important for manufacturers to share technology that furthers the goal of patient safety. However, we must also be cognizant of the potential problems that can arise and envision joint solutions.

Anesthesiology
74:198, 1991

Another Site for the Pulse Oximeter Probe

To the Editor—Monitoring oxygenation is considered to be a standard of care in anesthesiology. Pulse oximetry is one of the most common measurements. Most often, the probe is placed on a finger, the nose, or an ear lobe. Alternate sites were described recently by Hickerson et al.,1 who used the tongue, and by Gunter,2 who used the corner of the mouth. We found that the shaft of the penis may be an acceptable site as well.

A 2½-yr-old male was transferred to our hospital with pneumonia secondary to respiratory syncytial virus. He required mechanical ventilation and analyses of multiple arterial blood samples for ventilatory management. Peripheral perfusion was severely diminished, and he developed arterial thrombosis of all four extremities with gangrenous digits secondary to diffuse intravascular coagulation.

We placed a disposable pediatric pulse oximeter probe (Nellcor, Heywood, CA) around the proximal shaft of the patient’s penis. Oxygen saturation readings were within 1–2% of those obtained concurrently with a probe placed on his nose. Analyses of several arterial blood samples confirmed the accuracy of the penile pulse oximetry values. There were no complications, but respiratory excursion of the abdomen caused inaccuracies in oximetry reading when the shaft of the penis rested on the public area.

Anesthesiology

Transdermal Scopolamine and Postoperative Nausea and Vomiting

To the Editor—I read with interest the study by Bailey et al.,1 which found that transdermal scopolamine is an effective antiemetic in patients undergoing outpatient laparoscopy. Another recent double-blind comparison, by Koski et al.,2 found transdermal scopolamine to be of no benefit in reducing the incidence of nausea and vomiting postoperatively. The studies by Bailey et al.1 were confined to patients undergoing gynecological surgery, whereas the patients studied by Koski et al.2 had undergone different types of surgery. These differences are resolvable if one takes into account the paper by Palazzo and Strunin,3 which describes the lower incidence of nausea and vomiting in patients undergoing gynecologic operations compared with intraabdominal operations.

The potency and dose of analgesics used may be of some significance in these studies. The doses of fentanyl used by Bailey et al.1 (0.5–2.0 µg/kg) were less than the doses of fentanyl used by Koski et al.2 (5.0–5.0 µg/kg). In a previous study in which less potent analgesics (morphine

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(Accepted for publication October 16, 1990.)

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(Accepted for publication October 3, 1990.)
and meperidine) were used by Jackson et al.,* transdermal scopolamine was found to be an effective anti-nausea and anti-emetic even in patients having different types of surgery. These limited studies on the prophylactic use of transdermal scopolamine suggest that its effectiveness may be affected by the dose and potency of analgesics used.

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Anesthesiology
74:199, 1991

In Reply—It has been known for decades that opioids induce nausea and vomiting. As Dr. Hendley points out in his letter, it is logical to conclude that this effect is dose-dependent. Clinically, one hopes that there exists an optimal opioid dose that reduces pain and pain-induced nausea and vomiting without triggering opioid-induced nausea and vomiting. However, little data exist to support either of these notions. Although Bellville suggests that low doses of meperidine may actually reduce nausea and vomiting and that higher doses result in the opposite, most evidence indicates that the use of opioids in anaesthesia increases the risk and incidence of nausea and vomiting. Hence, often the recommendations are that antiemetic therapies be routinely applied when opioids are administered.

Until anesthetic agents are developed that can duplicate the benefits (whether real or only perceived) of intraoperative opioids and supplant the use of opioids as analgesics and anesthetics, the anesthesiologist should strive to know and apply the many available approaches to reducing nausea and vomiting. Scopolamine administered transdermally has had much success in abating motion sickness associated with air and sea travel. The simplicity and low cost of transdermal scopolamine for the reduction of postoperative nausea and vomiting should make it desirable for patients at high risk for emesis after elective surgery.

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(Accepted for publication October 16, 1990.)

Anesthesiology
74:199, 1991

Herpesvirus Infections and Intraspinal Opioids

To the Editor—The article by Crone et al.* turns a cold check to the widespread embrace by the specialty of the use of epidural and intrathecal opioids and opiates in the treatment of pain. The reactivation mechanism for dormant herpes labialis (HSV 1) remains obscure, but the association with epidural morphine administration is high. Until further prospective studies can be done, individuals who have a history of more sinister herpesvirus infection (ophthalmic herpetic infections or herpetic encephalitis) should be considered unacceptable candidates for injection of epidural and intrathecal opioids and opiates.

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(Accepted for publication October 16, 1990.)