CORRESPONDENCE

JAMES P. CIANGI
Vice President Research and Development
Kendall Healthcare Products Company
15 Hampshire Street
Mansfield, Massachusetts 02048

REFERENCE

1. Rigler ML, Drasner K: Distribution of catheter-injected local anesthetic in a model of the subarachnoid space. ANESTHESIOLOGY
75:684-692, 1991

(Accepted for publication March 26, 1992.)

AMY WENDELL
Section Manager, Research and Development

ANESTHESIOLOGY
77:212, 1992

II. Factors Affecting Distribution of Catheter-injected Local Anesthetic

To the Editor—I have several comments to make regarding the article by Rigler and Drasner, which examined the distribution of local anesthetics when injected using a catheter in a subarachnoid space model. This case study was published in the Laboratory Investigation section and could lead the reader to believe that the conclusions are based on sound scientific methodology. In fact, most of the comparisons were based on single events only, and therefore this article suffers from a major scientific flaw. Conclusions were drawn from single injections at a given rate, through a given catheter type and a given position in the subarachnoid space model. Although the results presented are intellectually acceptable, they do not address the possibility that they could have occurred by chance.

I therefore urge the authors to repeat the study with a large enough n (certainly not an n = 1) so that we, as critical readers, may be satisfied that the conclusions are derived from information that is statistically significant. I urge the case study, then it should have been identified as such.

At our institution, we have recently also studied the spread of isobaric and hyperbaric solutions in a subarachnoid space model using a 25-G needle, a multipoint 20-G catheter, and a 20-G distal port catheter under various conditions. Each specific condition was reproduced five times, and measurements were performed every minute for 5 min. The data were then analyzed for their statistical significance using a paired Student's t test. With a centrally located injection, using a 25-G needle or a multipoint catheter, both hyperbaric and isobaric solutions distributed symmetrically. However, using the distal port catheter the spread was diurnal (i.e., greater along the orientation of the catheter) with both types of solutions. We did not find that the baricity affected the asymmetry in spread, which remained constant (P < 0.001). As one would expect, the overall spread was twice as great with the hyperbaric as compared with isobaric solution (P < 0.001).

We also found in our study that spread had not stabilized by 3 min after injection. There was a 10-20% increase in spread depending on the mode of injection between 3 and 5 min. This may have introduced some error in the measurements in the paper by Rigler and Drasner, as the eight samples were drawn "beginning 3 min after each injection," and as it is unclear how long after injection the last sample was drawn. This again would warrant repetition of the measurements to determine the variance and the validity of the conclusions. Based on our results, we recommend the use of a multipoint catheter with a cephalad orientation using a hyperbaric solution for a high-level (T10-T12) block or an isobaric solution for an intermediate level (T10-T12) block. The use of a cephalad-oriented distal port catheter should be avoided, as it may run the risk of a large incidence of high spinal, especially when using hyperbaric solutions.

In conclusion, while our recommendations may agree with those of Rigler and Drasner, we have statistically validated the results used to draw these conclusions, thereby providing confidence that the data reflect an outcome not biased by a chance observation.

RALPH F. ERIAN, M.D., M.Sc., F.R.C.P.(C.)
Assistant Professor
Department of Anesthesiology
The University of Texas Health Science Center
7703 Floyd Curl Drive
San Antonio, Texas 78284-7838

REFERENCES

1. Rigler ML, Drasner K: Distribution of catheter-injected local anesthetic in a model of the subarachnoid space. ANESTHESIOLOGY
75:684-692, 1991


(Accepted for publication March 26, 1992.)