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nonresponders," the fractional change in PaO₂ varied from −7% to +6% (mean 0.8%, median 1.5%). Therefore, whether reported as differences or as ratios, the PaO₂ changes reveal large disparities in responsiveness to phenylephrine. The patients' responses cluster in two groups along a continuum, presumably reflecting variations in the underlying pathophysiology.

We repeated our analysis, as described previously, counting only the five patients described herein as phenylephrine responders. Even with the smaller group, the data still showed higher PaO₂ values with the combination of phenylephrine plus nitric oxide than with either treatment alone (P < 0.05). This supports our conclusion that a subgroup of patients can be identified with a clinically significant PaO₂ response to phenylephrine and that these patients will show an additional response to the combination of phenylephrine plus nitric oxide.

We agree, as we noted in our article, that our study did not have the power to identify changes in other physiologic variables (such as cardiac output) that might help to explain the PaO₂ results. It is also possible that patients with sepsis might be phenylephrine "nonresponders." Our study did not address that last question, because we excluded all patients with septic physiology. We found that improvement in PaO₂ with phenylephrine decreased as adult respiratory distress syndrome became more severe (negative correlation with Murray's score, r = 0.64, P < 0.05). The clinical status of the subject is evidently an important determinant of response to treatment, which future studies may help to elucidate.

Drs. Troncy and Blaise suggest that the large variability in baseline values of PaO₂ reduced the power of our study. However, the variability was between patients not between measurements, so patterns of response to treatment could still be identified. Each patient provided a baseline before and after each measurement; patients reliably returned to their own baselines, with insignificant variation. Therefore, in analyzing the data, we were able to perform two-way analysis of variance to separate the effects of treatments from the differences between patients. (These parametric methods were warranted by the continuous nature of the data.)

We agree that our small group and even smaller subgroups do not constitute a statistically powerful sample. However, our results convince us that phenylephrine improves oxygenation in certain patients and that these improvements may be additive or synergistic with the effects of nitric oxide. This conclusion warrants further study in a larger population to explore the magnitude of the effects and their potential therapeutic usefulness.

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