To the Editor—It was interesting to read the case report by Fleck et al. suggesting an appropriate duration of cerebrospinal fluid drainage after thoracoabdominal aneurysm repair. However, toward the end of their discussion, the authors mention that draining 1,700 ml cerebrospinal fluid over 24 h is seven times greater than the normal 250 ml cerebrospinal fluid that is produced in the same period. Although it may be a minor point, cerebrospinal fluid is actually formed at the rate of 500–550 ml/24 h and not 250 ml, as mentioned by the authors.2–5 It is not clear from the article of Conzen et al. which was the peak postoperative troponin I value in the two groups and whether this value was significantly different.

Alberto Zangrillo, M.D., Giovanni Landoni, M.D.,* Marta Putzu, M.D. * IRCCS San Raffaele Hospital of Milan, Milan, Italy. landoni.giovanni@hsr.it

References

(Accepted for publication February 6, 2004.)

Cerebrospinal Fluid Physiology and Cerebrospinal Fluid Drainage

To the Editor—It was interesting to read the case report by Fleck et al. suggesting an appropriate duration of cerebrospinal fluid drainage after thoracoabdominal aneurysm repair. However, toward the end of their discussion, the authors mention that draining 1,700 ml cerebrospinal fluid over 24 h is seven times greater than the normal 250 ml cerebrospinal fluid that is produced in the same period. Although it may be a minor point, cerebrospinal fluid is actually formed at the rate of 500–550 ml/24 h and not 250 ml, as mentioned by the authors.2–5

Rajesh Mahajan, M.D.,* Rahul Gupta, M.B.B.S. * Acharya Shri Chander College of Medical Sciences, Jammu, India. drmahajan@yahoo.com, drmahajan@rediffmail.com

References

(Accepted for publication February 6, 2004.)
Anesthesiology 2004; 100:1621

In Reply—We thank Drs. Mahajan and Gupta for their comment. Our data were based on a neuroanatomy text written by the head of the anatomy department of the Medical University of Vienna. However, we wish to stress that the main purpose of our case report is to discuss the clinical value of a longer period of cerebrospinal fluid drainage. The details of normal cerebrospinal fluid physiology are beyond the scope of our article.

Tatiana Fleck, M.D.,* Martin Grabenwoger, M.D. * Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. 0204604@hotmail.com

(accepted for publication February 6, 2004.)

Table 1. Initial Referred Pain Sensitivity Analysis and Statistical Significance with Inclusion of Nonparametric Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Referred Pain Sensitivity Analysis</th>
<th>Acetazolamide Group</th>
<th>Placebo Group</th>
<th>P Value (t Test)</th>
<th>P Value (Nonparametric)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ Replaced by 3</td>
<td>0.78 ± 1.55</td>
<td>3.10 ± 3.42</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Replaced by 5</td>
<td>1.00 ± 1.94</td>
<td>3.40 ± 3.48</td>
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<tr>
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Using the Visual Analog Scale

To the Editor—I read with interest the report of Woehlck et al. on the use of acetazolamide in the treatment of referred pain after laparoscopic surgery. To assess postoperative pain, the authors report using a visual analog scale but state that some patients were unable to respond with a number, whereas others reported a range (e.g., 2–3). The visual analog scale is a continuous line or band along which a subject selects a point corresponding to the intensity of pain experienced. From the authors’ description, one may conclude that patients were verbally rating their pain on a scale from 1 to 10. This method, although acceptable, is neither a visual analog nor a continuous measurement. Instead, the scores obtained are ordinal and, as such, should not be reported as means or analyzed using an unpaired t test, as was done in this article. How this misunderstanding may have affected the interpretation of the results and the conclusions drawn is unclear.

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References


(accepted for publication February 9, 2004.)

In Reply—Dr. Cohen raises a multitude of interesting points that may apply to many studies of pain. Is a verbal report of the value represented on a visual analog scale (VAS) equivalent to pointing to the same number drawn on a line or marking a line mechanically? Studies have found absolute differences but good correlation between different methods in these rating scales. In our study, we accepted verbal responses because of the ease of obtaining such a verbal response at the necessary time, which was immediately after anesthesia and surgery. The potential difficulty in accurately pointing to or physically marking the intended number when postsurgical pain and residual anesthetic effects are present may have made this maneuver impractical.

The rationale for accepting a positive response when a patient could not respond with a number, either verbally or by pointing, is logical because some patients were in too much pain to care about the study while just emerging from anesthesia or were still too groggy to give anything except a positive response regarding the presence of pain. For this reason, we performed a sensitivity analysis substituting mid-range (5), high (7), or low (3) values for positive responses, and recalculated the statistical analysis. For each of these values, the acetazolamide group had lower initial referred pain scores than the placebo group, demonstrating that the actual value of the positive responses was not important.

The question of how to statistically handle the VAS in a general sense, i.e., whether to treat it as an ordinal value or a continuous variable, is important. Fortunately, this question of whether VAS scores can be evaluated using parametric statistical analyses, such as a t test or analysis of variance test, or should only be subjected to nonparametric analyses, such as the Wilcoxon rank sum test (nonparametric two sample t test) or Kruskal-Wallis test (nonparametric analysis of variance), has already been studied. Parametric tests compare means of data, and these data should ideally be normally distributed. The methods of analysis have been controversial, and early manuscripts from the 1970s and 1980s emphasized using nonparametric tests to avoid erroneous claims of difference when none existed. However, more recently, Dexter and Chestnut determined that the t or analysis of variance tests had slightly greater power than nonparametric tests to detect differences between groups and are good choices to compare VAS scores. Using actual data and computer simulations, Dexter and Chestnut further demonstrated that parametric analysis of as few as five categories of VAS data had power similar to that of a continuous VAS, although the use of fewer than five categories had reduced power.

Table 1. Initial Referred Pain Sensitivity Analysis and Statistical Significance with Inclusion of Nonparametric Analyses

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statistical power to identify a real difference. However, if large numbers of patients (> 16%) cluster at the extremes of the data range, nonparametric analyses may be less prone to error.³

Applying this general question to our study,² 45% (placebo group) and 78% (acetazolamide group) of patients had no referred pain at the initial postoperative measurement, and thus had a VAS of 0, representing no pain and hence a true, absolute zero. The VAS extended to 10, producing 11 categories, which exceeds the minimum of five found to be necessary by Dexter and Chestnut.² In our acetazolamide study, the data clustered around the lower extreme but not both extremes, and the SDs were small. In addition to the t tests, we simultaneously performed a nonparametric analysis, and both methodologies had similar P values. Space limitations encouraged us to neither publish nor describe the details of the nonparametric analysis because the results were redundant. Table 1 in this letter is a revision of table 2 from the original study. It includes the P values derived nonparametrically for comparison with the parametric results originally published.⁴

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(Accepted for publication February 9, 2004.)

Increased Margin of Safety of Morphine-6-glucuronide Relative to Morphine

To the Editor:—With interest we read the Editorial View by Dr. Jeffrey Gross in the October 2003 issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY¹ commenting on our article in that same issue.² In this article, we estimated an effect size (i.e., brain) concentration of morphine-6-glucuronide (M6G) to cause 25% reduction in breathing during hypercapnic and hypoxic stimulation (C₂₅) of 530 and 870 nM, respectively. Dr. Gross compares these C₂₅ values derived from an electrical pain model re-

duction in breathing during hypercapnic and hypoxic stimulation (C₂₅) of 530 and 870 nM, respectively. Dr. Gross compares these values to plasma concentrations of 400 nM from a study by Lötsch et al.³ at which no analgesia was perceived. We believe that these numbers are incomparable. Our C₂₅ values are the estimated brain concentrations, whereas the value of Lötsch et al. is a plasma concentra-

In fact, in a subsequent study in which we tested the analgesic properties of M6G, we observed that a steady state or brain M6G concentration (C₂₅₂) of 275 nM is needed for a 25% increase in electrical current (pain tolerance).³ The corresponding C₂₅ value for morphine is 20–30 nM.⁶ This indicates that much greater M6G concentrations are needed to suppress respiration relative to the values needed to induce analgesia greater than placebo.⁵ In sharp contrast, for morphine, these values are of the same order of magnitude. Evidently, how our C₂₅ and C₂₅₂ values derived from an electrical pain model reflect concentrations needed for postoperative pain relief necessitates further study.

Finally, we were surprised to find the most important statement in the Editorial View in a footnote. In that footnote, Dr. Gross indicates the need for a respiratory model that adequately describes apnea at relatively high opioid concentrations. In contrast to the other model described in the review, the model used by us (the power or Leiden model) is able to predict apnea at realistic opioid concentrations. For example, the Leiden model indicates that hypercapnic breathing is abolished at a morphine brain concentration of approximately 100 nM in a volunteer without pain or stress. This is a very realistic value.

Raymonda Romberg, M.D., Erik Olofsen, M.Sc., Elise Sarton, M.D., Ph.D., Luc Teppema, Ph.D., Albert Dahan, M.D., Ph.D.; *Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands. adahan@anesthesia.nl

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sements among groups. ANESTHESIOLOGY 2000; 93:1245–54

(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)
analgescic potency of M6G come from an abstract that was presented at the October 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists (San Francisco, California) after my editorial had appeared in print. Furthermore, based on the data presented in the abstract, the confidence limits for the analgesic potency of M6G were even wider than those for respiratory depression. The mean brain concentration estimated to increase pain tolerance by 25% was 275 nM, with 95% confidence limits ranging from 7 to 557 nM; these values clearly overlap the 95% confidence range for respiratory depression. Thus, the combined data from the two studies of Romberg et al. do not demonstrate a statistically or clinically significant respiratory-sparing effect of M6G. Therefore, I stand by my conclusion that even with their new data, the authors have yet to demonstrate an increased margin of safety for M6G as compared with morphine.

Romberg et al. raised concerns regarding the placement of the “most important statement” of my Editorial View in a footnote. This was not done to minimize the importance of model selection, but rather to avoid interfering with the flow of the associated text.

Jeffrey B. Gross, M.D. University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Farmington, Connecticut. gross@neuron.uchc.edu

References


(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)

To the Editor:—I read with interest the article by Calder et al.1 showing that limitation of craniocervical extension to less than 36° limits interdental distance. They propose this as another possible mechanism for limitation of craniocervical extension to less than 36°. They also demonstrated that neither the sniff position nor simple extension result in a fundamental question: If extension is the essential advantage of the sniff position over the neutral position, overall, it is of interest to consider whether other predictors of difficult intubation, such as micrognathia or decreased thyromental distance, are also related to mouth opening or impaired extension. It is of further interest to consider the Mallampati classification as another measure of mouth opening. Mouth opening is expressed as interdental distance in the study of Calder et al., whereas with the Mallampati classification, it can be expressed as palatoglossal distance. Stated

Leonard Lee, M.B.B.S. Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne, Australia. leonard.lee@mh.org.au

References


To the Editor:—I read with great interest the study of mouth opening and craniocervical extension by Calder et al.1 Although the authors were circumspect in their interpretation, the relation between extension and mouth opening may provide an important basis for laryngoscopic positioning. Adnet et al.2 demonstrated that for routine intubation, the “sniffing position” does not confer any advantage over simple head extension. Put another way (again, for routine intubation), the essential advantage of the sniffing position over the neutral position results from head extension. Other studies of Adnet et al.3,4 have shown that neither the sniffing position nor simple extension result in the alignment of the oral, laryngeal, and pharyngeal axes. Collectively, these data resulted in a fundamental question: If extension is the essential advantage of the sniffing position over neutrality and extension does not align the oral, laryngeal, and pharyngeal axes, wherein lies its value? The study of Calder et al. makes an important step toward an answer: The value of extension may be that it facilitates mouth opening rather than axis alignment.

It has clearly been shown that limitations of mouth opening are associated with difficult intubation.5,6 The study by Karkouti et al.7 demonstrates that poor mouth opening and craniocervical extension are predictive of difficult intubation. These two “independent” variables have now been shown to be linked, suggesting that limitation of interdental distance is the ultimate disadvantage imposed by impaired extension. It is of interest to consider whether other predictors of difficult intubation, such as micrognathia or decreased thyromental distance, are also related to mouth opening or impaired extension. It is of further interest to consider the Mallampati classification as another measure of mouth opening. Mouth opening is expressed as interdental distance in the study of Calder et al., whereas with the Mallampati classification, it can be expressed as palatoglossal distance.

Mouth Opening, Craniocervical Extension, and Laryngoscopic Positioning

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References


(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)
another way, interdental distance reflects true mouth opening, while palatoglossal distance reflects effective mouth opening, i.e., the actual volume of free space achievable in the oral cavity independent of the interdental distance. When either interdental or palatoglossal distance are limited by conditions such a decreased cervical mobility, micrognathia, or hyperglossia, intubation is rendered more difficult.

The study of Calder et al., in conjunction with the studies cited above, suggests that craniofacial extension is a crucial aspect of laryngoscopic positioning and that its value lies in optimizing the degree of interdental distance. As the authors suggest, the next step is to investigate this in the setting of true laryngoscopic positioning, evaluating the maximal gape-facilitating angle of extension in anesthetized patients whose oral airways are actively being manipulated. I would further suggest that mouth opening—delineated as true (interdental distance) and effective (palatoglossal distance)—may emerge as the most important measure of difficult intubation and that its maximization may form the basis of rational laryngoscopic positioning.

George A. Mashour, M.D., Ph.D. Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts. gmashour@partners.org

In Reply:—We thank Drs. Lee and Mashour for their interest in our article. We established that there is a link between mouth opening and craniofacial position in conscious volunteers. When the subjects were prevented from extending from the neutral position, we found that the upper 95% confidence limit of interdental distance was 37 mm, which is the same as the lower limit of normal interdental distance in young people.1

The motions of the temporomandibular joint include depression, elevation, protrusion, retraction, and side-to-side grinding movements.2 From the airway management point of view, although almost infinite protrusion should be advantageous, we agree with Dr. Lee that excessive depression can be inimical to our interests.

Dr. Mashour mentions the Mallampati examination. It was the unexpected success of the Mallampati examination in patients with cervical spine disease3 that led us to perform our investigation. As far as we know, the positive predictive value of the Mallampati examination has only exceeded 50% (the same as tossing a coin) in our study3 and Dr. Mallampati’s original series.4 Unfortunately, the Mallampati examination has not proved to be a useful predictor of difficult direct laryngoscopy in any other patient population.5

Our findings may not be reproduced in anesthetized patients. Nevertheless, we suspect that one of the reasons that the snif position is popular for direct laryngoscopy6 is that it produces craniofacial extension and facilitates mouth opening.

Mouth opening is a complex phenomenon, and we have complemented its analysis because the craniofacial junction must now be included in the list of factors involved. We hope that some of those involved in airway management or oropharyngeal surgery will find it useful to know that active mouth opening can be facilitated by craniofacial extension and impeded by flexion.


References


(Received for publication February 10, 2004.)

Patient Positioning and Ultrasound Guidance Are Important in Bilateral Cannulation of Internal Jugular Veins

To the Editor.—We congratulate Stocchetti et al., on their interesting case report and the favorable outcome of the patient. We agree with the authors that bilateral cannulation of internal jugular veins may worsen intracranial hypertension. Nevertheless, we wish to make some comments:

For internal jugular vein cannulation, their patient’s head and torso were placed in a flat position, and the head was even slightly rotated. All these procedures are known to increase intracranial pressure in patients with reduced intracranial compliance.2 In the context of increased intracranial pressure, we wonder why the internal jugular vein route was preferred for the insertion of the 8-French introducer and Swan-Ganz catheter to the subclavian or external jugular vein route.

In our opinion, Doppler or B-mode ultrasound guidance should always be used in these patients. Recently, we were able to demonstrate the safe cannulation even of the internal jugular veins in patients

References


(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)
A 4.42% Reduction in the Cross-sectional Area of a Jugular Vein Cannot Result in Doubling of the Intracranial Pressure

To the Editor.—We read with interest the case report by Stocchetti et al. entitled “Bilateral Cannulation of Internal Jugular Veins May Worsen Intracranial Hypertension.” We agree with the authors’ hypothesis that bilateral cannulation of the internal jugular veins with large-bore catheters in patients with increased intracranial pressure (ICP) and limited buffering capacity of the intracranial system may cause an additional increase in the intracranial volume and hence ICP. We disagree, however, that their case report supports this hypothesis.

The authors describe a head-injured trauma patient with increased ICP to 30 mmHg. A 16-gauge catheter had been placed retrograde in the bulb of the right internal jugular vein. After placement of an 8-French introducer into the left internal jugular vein, a pulmonary artery (PA) catheter of unspecified size was inserted. With the patient supine, the ICP increased to more than 50 mmHg. After removal of the introducer, leaving the PA catheter in place, the ICP suddenly decreased to previous levels.

Although an increase in resistance of the jugular vein may theoretically result in an increase in ICP, we disagree with the authors that their case report illustrates this concept. To unequivocally prove this, the authors should have measured jugular venous pressure proximal to the insertion site both before and after the insertion of the catheters and shown a significant increase in jugular venous pressure after their insertion. Only then could they relate the increase in ICP to the obstruction of blood flow secondary to an increase in jugular venous resistance due to the presence of the catheter.

The authors believe the cause of the increase in ICP after insertion of the 8-French introducer is related to the greater size of the introducer (due to the presence of the catheter) and the length of catheter in the blood vessel. Seven French is the smallest size of PA catheter available in adults, which is not significantly smaller than an 8-French introducer. The axial cross-sectional area of an 8-French introducer is approximately 5.09 mm² versus 3.90 mm² for a 7-French PA catheter, a difference of 1.19 mm². Furthermore, knowing that increasing the length of a catheter in a blood vessel results in increasing resistance to blood flow and considering the greater length of the PA catheter inside the vessel as compared with the introducer, the difference on the effect of increased resistance between the introducer and PA catheter becomes even more insignificant. Therefore, the authors should not have observed such a significant reduction in ICP after removal of the introducer while leaving the PA catheter in place.

The authors observed an increase in ICP to greater than 50 mmHg, which is approximately twice the value noted before the insertion of the introducer (fig. 1 in their published article).

Because cerebral blood flow remained constant according to the authors, the only remaining variable that could possibly explain the doubling of the ICP is a 50% reduction in the cross-sectional area of the internal jugular vein due to insertion of an 8-French introducer. Comparing the axial cross-sectional area of the left internal jugular vein (114.93 mm²) and that of the introducer (5.09 mm²), one may expect an approximate 4.42% increase in resistance, and hence ICP, compared with baseline values when the introducer is placed into the vein. Considering bilateral drainage of cerebral blood, one would expect an even smaller increase in resistance, approximately half or 2.21%.

The authors state: “Leaving the Swan-Ganz catheter in place, we withdrew the introducer from the vein; the ICP suddenly decreased to previous values (fig. 1).” However, their figure 1 actually illustrates a reduction in the ICP after removal of the introducer to levels even lower than the baseline values of 20–30 mmHg into the range of less than 10 mmHg. There has been an inexplicable “overshooting” of the
decrease in ICP greater than that which should have occurred by merely removing the introducer. Therefore, removal of the introducer cannot be the explanation for their observations. We believe their explanation is erroneous in that it falls short of providing adequate justification for the observed phenomena.

Leila Khorasani, M.D., Kenneth D. Candido, M.D., Ahmed H. Ghaleb, M.D.,* University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. Lkhorasa@u.washington.edu

In Reply:—We are grateful to both correspondents for their stimulating comments. The experience of Drs. Schummer with ultrasound is highly informative and potentially useful for preventing both short-term and long-term complications of jugular cannulation. We agree with them that a previous estimation of the left internal jugular vein (IJV) size in our case could have been extremely useful and that alternative venous accesses should have been used.

The calculations given by Khorasani et al. are detailed and intriguing but based on questionable assumptions and partially incorrect. Briefly, they assumed a caliber of the left IJV, calculated a reduction in its caliber, extrapolated a small reduction in flow, and concluded that this reduction could not explain the observed massive intracranial pressure (ICP) increase. The caliber of the left IJV in our patients is unknown. It has been reported that the caliber of the IJV is highly variable and that there is asymmetry between the two sides. In fact, the IJV diameter may range from 2.5 to 12 mm. The assumed left IJV cross-sectional area is based on an article in which the authors acknowledged as a limitation of the study the inaccuracy of the method used to estimate the jugular vein diameter. We would be reluctant to apply data from that article to this specific patient. Khorasani et al. calculated the reduction of the left IJV caliber due to cannulation as the difference between cross-sectional areas, which is appropriate for perfectly co-axial tubes, without considering that the catheter enters into the vessel with a slope. The vein wall is thin and extremely deformable; therefore, the geometry at the level of cannulation could have been profoundly distorted.

However, even accepting these assumptions, Khorasani et al. did not consider that the resistance to flow is inversely proportional to the forth power of the radius, if laminar flow is likely to occur. Therefore, in their simplified model, the reduction of the left IJV radius caused by the introducer would cause an 11% resistance increase, rather than a 4.4% increase.

Finally, Khorasani et al. state that a 50% reduction in the cross-sectional area is required for almost doubling ICP. This assumption is definitely wrong. Intracranial pressure is not linearly related to cerebral blood flow because it depends on intracranial volumes, including cerebral blood volume, and intracranial elastance. When intracranial elastance is critically reduced, an increase in cerebral blood volume as small as 2.8 ml may increase ICP from 30 to 50 mmHg (assuming a pressure volume index of 13 ml, which is the critical value reported by Marmarou et al.). Therefore, a small change in venous outflow can cause a sharp ICP change if cerebral blood volume changes even slightly in the context of exhausted intracranial compensatory mechanisms.

The response of the intracranial vasculature to an abrupt ICP increase is complex and usually implies a marked vasodilation to keep cerebral blood flow constant despite the reduced cerebral perfusion pressure. The opposite happens when the venous outflow improves, because an increase in cerebral perfusion pressure could induce vasoconstriction, which may explain the “overshooting” of ICP after removing the introducer. We cannot prove this assumption in our clinical case because we did not measure blood flow and intracranial elastance; therefore, we propose our interpretation of the facts as probable rather than proven, as we specified in our case report.

We believe that increased resistance to blood flow in the IJVs due to vascular cannulations remains a potential cause of sudden and deleterious ICP increase.

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References

(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)

Do We Need a Low Dose of Succinylcholine to Facilitate Intubation in Teaching Hospitals?

To the Editor:—We read with interest the article by Naguib et al. in which the authors recommended using 0.5–0.6 mg/kg succinylcholine to facilitate tracheal intubation in a rapid-sequence induction. In their study, all of patients were intubated successfully; however, the authors did not provide data regarding whether all patients were successfully intubated on the first try or some patients required two or more tries.

We work in a teaching hospital, and half of the employees in our department are residents and trainees. Routinely, these young anesthesiologists have at most two tries; if they fail, the attending anesthesiologists perform the intubation, when at least 2–3 min has passed since succinylcholine was injected. Although recovery of adductor pollicis from a dose of 0.5–0.6 mg/kg succinylcholine (T1 to 10%) occurs at

References

(Accepted for publication February 10, 2004.)

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To the Editor:—We read with interest the article of Naguib et al. and the Editorial View of Donati regarding optimal succinylcholine dose used for intubation. In their article, Naguib et al. conclude that the recommended dose of 1 mg/kg succinylcholine for intubation at 60 s may be excessive and that reducing the dose to 0.56 mg/kg would provide some intubating conditions in 95% of patients with normal airway anatomy and allow a more rapid return of spontaneous respiration.

In our opinion, patients with normal airway anatomy, as those included in the study of Naguib et al., are not the challenging cases to anesthesiologists. They can easily be intubated even with a reduced dose of succinylcholine, and it is indifferent whether return of spontaneous respiration in these patients is rapid or slow. However, patients who are muscular, are obese, or have abnormal airway anatomy and parturients undergoing cesarean delivery present a challenge to anesthesiologists during intubation. Profound and intense muscular relaxation is necessary to obtain an optimal/best attempt at intubation. In their article, Naguib et al. conclude that the recommended dose of 1.0 mg/kg rather than studying lower doses.

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References

(Accepted for publication February 20, 2004.)

Should the Intubating Dose of Succinylcholine Be Revisited?

To the Editor—Although we find the two studies by Naguib et al. and Kopman et al. to be theoretically interesting, we believe that it is dangerous to link them with our everyday anesthetic practice. The data sheet for Scoline (Evans Medical, Surrey, United Kingdom), which used to be one of our available preparations of succinylcholine in the United Kingdom, states its precautions that “Scoline must never be given when there is doubt about the ability to ventilate the lungs.” In keeping with this, it has never been our practice to rely on the short duration of action of succinylcholine as a “get-out clause” in the event of a failed rapid sequence intubation.

The wide variability in a patient’s breakdown of succinylcholine is well known, and surely both of these studies show that using a lower dose of succinylcholine makes an intubation attempt more likely to fail. There may then still be the problem of prolonged paralysis.

Because a successful intubation is of paramount importance in this group of patients, we want to have the best intubation conditions. Therefore, on the basis of these studies, we believe it would be more clinically relevant to have studied the effects on the intubating conditions of using a higher dose of succinylcholine than the standard dose of 1.0 mg/kg rather than studying lower doses.

Mark Messent, M.D., F.R.C.A.,* Michael S. Lim, F.R.C.A. * The London Chest Hospital, London, United Kingdom. mark.messent@bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

References

(Accepted for publication February 20, 2004.)

What Is the Correct Dose of Succinylcholine?

To the Editor—We must never be given when there is doubt about the ability to ventilate the lungs. Therefore, the attending anesthesiologist may face a worse intubation condition than the resident or fellow met. Sometimes an additional dose of succinylcholine is required.

We want to emphasize the advantages of using 1.0 or 1.5 mg/kg succinylcholine for intubation in this condition. First, the quality of the intubation condition is expected to increase with dose. In the study of Naguib et al., the incidence of acceptable intubation was not significantly different whether patients received 0.6 or 1.0 mg/kg succinylcholine, but the incidence of excellent intubation condition was higher if 1.0 mg/kg was administered (80% vs. <60%, 1.0 mg/kg vs. 0.6 mg/kg, respectively). This is important for an inexperienced anesthesiologist to perform a difficult intubation under better conditions. Second, the senior anesthesiologist will still have chance for intubation under good conditions without giving additional succinylcholine when a junior doctor fails after one or two tries. The duration of apnea after 1.5 mg/kg succinylcholine is approximately 2 min longer than that after 0.5 mg/kg succinylcholine. This 2 min is enough for one attempt at performing intubation but is not a difficult problem for anesthesiologists to maintain the artery oxygen saturation of patients by manual ventilation via facemask or laryngeal mask airway.

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References

(Accepted for publication February 20, 2004.)
To the Editor—Regarding the optimal intubating dose of succinylcholine,1,2 I vividly recall the late Francis Foldes, M.D., then Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, New York, exhorting his residents not to dare use any more than 0.6 mg/kg for tracheal intubation. Furthermore, he taught us to administer the drug over 30–60 s, thus virtually eliminating fasciculations and myalgia, a benefit that neither Naguib et al. nor Kopman et al. mentioned.

In their seminal reports 50 yr ago, Foldes3 and Hampton4 point out that the main advantage of succinylcholine is that it provides brief intense relaxation for intubation thus permitting the anesthesiologist to use smaller amounts of nondepolarizing muscle relaxants as dictated by the nature of the case. In the past decade, with the proliferation of newer short-acting nondepolarizing muscle relaxants and inexpensive train-offour stimulators, this advantage seems to have been deemed insignificant or entirely forgotten. For example, to avoid large doses of nondepolarizing muscle relaxants, Caldwell5 suggested intubating with high doses of propofol or opioids and never mentioned succinylcholine even to condemn its use.

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References

(Accepted for publication February 20, 2004.)
In Reply:—We certainly have no argument with the position of Drs. Messent and Lim that when serious doubt exists about one’s ability to secure a patent airway, the administration of neuromuscular blocking agents is contraindicated. As our data3 make clear, even after doses of succinylcholine as low as 0.40 mg/kg, significant recovery (at the adductor pollicis) may on occasion not begin until 6–7 min have elapsed. Nonetheless, we feel compelled to point out that even experienced anesthetists may misjudge the ease of tracheal intubation. In these circumstances, the shorter the period of “cannot intubate, cannot ventilate” is, the better.

Forty years ago, when the senior author was a resident, a common intubation sequence consisted of little more than 4 mg/kg thiopental and 0.60 mg/kg succinylcholine. In that era, this protocol produced some fairly “ugly” intubations. Four decades later, after an induction consisting of propofol and a short-acting opioid, the same dose of succinylcholine produces highly satisfactory conditions for tracheal intubation in the majority of patients. For routine nonemergent intubation, we rarely exceed this dose. Nevertheless, as we pointed out in our conclusion, when complete neuromuscular block is critical, doses of succinylcholine as high as 1.0–1.5 mg/kg may be still be appropriate.

We would also like to thank Dr. Kron for his kind remarks. However, we think that the efficacy of the slow administration of succinylcholine as a means of reducing the magnitude of fasciculations and the incidence of postoperative myalgia is controversial. Certainly, this strategy has been offered by several authors.2,3 On the other hand, there is equally convincing data to suggest that this technique is not efficacious.7,8 We would suggest that the hypothesis that small initial doses of succinylcholine produce a “self-taming” effect remains unproven.

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References

(Accepted for publication February 20, 2004.)

Outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in Singapore and Modifications in the Anesthesia Service

To the Editor:—The World Health Organization issued a global alert on atypical pneumonia and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the risk to healthcare workers on the March 12, 2003, after reports from Hong Kong, China, and Vietnam.* This letter reports the changes in anesthetic practice in our hospital during the 2-month outbreak in Singapore.

All patients who had fever and dyspnea were treated as suspect SARS patients, even if they had no SARS contact history. All elective surgery was postponed during the outbreak; only emergency and cancer operations were performed. The operating complex reception staff completed a checklist (table 1) and checked the temperature of all patients. Patients with unexplained temperatures 37.5°C or higher had surgery delayed until a cause was established. Patients were categorized as low-, medium-, and high-risk patients (table 2).

All staff were provided with thermometers to check and report their temperature thrice daily. Anyone with a temperature 37.5°C or higher had to stop work and have a checkup at the staff clinic. All staff kept a log of all patients they had contact with, to facilitate contact tracing, and the information was collated daily centrally. The anesthesiology and operating room (OR) staff were grouped into two teams working alternate stretches, so that if one team became infected, the other team could take over and maintain the service. Contact between the two teams was strongly discouraged, and all department meetings were postponed.

All staff had to pass an assessment on the correct use, removal, and disposal of personal protection equipment. At mask-fitting and leak-testing exercises, different makes of masks were tried, and those who were unable to achieve a good mask fit were posted out of the OR to areas with low risk of SARS exposure. For low-risk patients undergoing surgery in the general ORs, all OR staff donned N95 masks, goggles, splash-proof gowns, and gloves. The anesthesiologists practiced double gloving and removed the outer gloves immediately after any invasive or airway procedure before handling clean equipment. Eight medium- and high-risk patients were considered SARS exposed or suspect SARS patients, and they underwent surgery in the isolation OR. These patients were transferred into the operating complex wearing an N95 mask if they had no dyspnea, and the anesthesiologists used additional protection of powered air-purifying respirator systems (3M Jupiter Air filter unit and HT-101 hood; 3M UK PLC, Bracknell, United Kingdom; or T4 Personal Protection System; Stryker Instruments, Kalamazo, MI) and surgical gowns. Probable SARS patients were not operated on in this hospital but were transferred to a designated SARS hospital.

The OR at the end of the last bank of ORs, closest to an entry point into the operating complex, was designated the isolation OR. Access to this OR was reduced to two points with double doors, and the other doors were sealed. All equipment not used during a particular opera-


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Anesthesiology 2004; 100:1629–30 © 2004 American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc.
Table 2. Classification of Patients Based on Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient Response</th>
<th>Category of Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No to all five questions in checklist and temperature &lt; 37.5°C</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes to any question and temperature &lt; 37.5°C</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No to all questions and temperature ≥ 37.5°C</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes to any question and temperature ≥ 37.5°C</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anesthesiology 2004; 100:1630–1

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**Correspondence**

**Modified Protective Suits for Anesthesiologists Performing Tracheal Intubation for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Patients in Taiwan**

To the Editor—Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a disease associated with coronavirus that has been recently described in patients in Asia, North America, and Europe.1–3 The outbreak of SARS occurred in northern Taiwan since March 2003 and spread all over the island in the following 2 months. Here we report our experience of using modified personal protective suits during tracheal intubation procedures in 40 patients who contracted SARS.

Since April 2003, there were 70 probable and suspected SARS patients in our medical center, which is a 2,400-bed tertiary hospital. The SARS patients were kept in negatively pressurized isolation units for intensive care. Among them, 14 patients eventually died because of intractable respiratory failure. All criteria for the diagnosis of probable and suspect SARS cases were based on the guidelines made by the World Health Organization. During the outbreak, 40 probable SARS patients were intubated by 8 anesthesiologists and 23 nurse anesthetists. Our practice guideline for tracheal intubation in SARS patients was similar to that mentioned by others.4 Because the personal protective equipment recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, such as Stryker T4 (Stryker Instruments, Kalama- zoo, MI) and powered air-purifying respirators (e.g., 3M AirMate; 3M, St. Paul, MN) were not available during the outbreak, we had to modify our own protective suits and equipment against SARS. The safety and efficiency of our modified suits, however, had not yet been proven.

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Anesthesiology, V 100, No 6, Jun 2004

Possible, and when general anesthesia was required, we used low fresh gas flows, including bag-mask ventilation. We stopped using nebulizers in the operating complex. We used and changed a heat-moisture exchanger filter, a second microbial filter at the end of the expiratory tubing, circle system tubing, and carbon dioxide absorbent after every patient. To reduce wastage, only one absorbent canister was filled to a quarter. It was not practical to change the fixed tubings and ventilator bellows of the anesthetic machine.

When it was safe to do so, tracheal intubation was performed under full paralysis, and patients were extubated “deep” to minimize coughing and gagging. When disconnection of the patient and the circuit was required to facilitate positioning, the disconnection was made, leaving the heat-moisture exchanger filter attached to the endotracheal tube or laryngeal mask. Low-risk patients recovered in the PACU, whereas medium- and high-risk patients undergoing surgery in the isolation OR recovered fully there and were then transferred to the ward, avoiding the PACU.

Because SARS is a new disease, these changes were not evidence based. Although no patients or staff were infected in the OR, we are unable to determine which interventions were necessary, because everything was done at once. In particular, grouping of staff into cohorts may not have been useful, and these changes have greatly affected operating efficiency and cost.

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Reference


(Accepted for publication August 7, 2003.)
ipated in tracheal intubation procedures on three SARS patients. None of them had worn any protective suits during the intubation procedure and caused a high infectivity rate of SARS (100%, 13 of 13). Although standard precaution against droplets and contact has been shown effective for routine procedure,\textsuperscript{4}–\textsuperscript{5} a higher level of personal protective equipment is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for high-risk procedures such as tracheal intubation. Because of the limited medical resources during the outbreak, powered air-purifying respirators and Stryker T4 protection systems were beyond our expectation. Using the modified protective suits during tracheal intubation procedures in 40 SARS patients (figs. 1 and 2), none of our anesthesia staff members contracted SARS (0%, 0 of 31). It should be noted, however, that not all of the commercially available protective equipment have been proven to be totally effective against coronavirus infection. Therefore, our limited experience on this suit modification should not be regarded as an accepted standard but only an alternative option when powered air-purifying respirators and Stryker systems are not available. Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation and a recent editorial viewpoint,\textsuperscript{7},\textsuperscript{8} powered air-purifying respirators or Stryker T4 systems should be the minimum requirement when intubating SARS patients cannot be avoided.

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Fig. 1. Modified personal protective suit with mask. (Left) N-95 mask; (middle) half face piece with P-100 filter; (right) half face piece with P3-level filter. Protective suit (Tyvek) with goggle and surgical gloves are the basic requirements.

Fig. 2. Hood, face shield, and positive flow of oxygen. (Left) SR-64 protective hood; (middle) SR-64 hood with face shield made of plastic cloth and transparency film; (right) oxygen (greater than 10 l/min) was delivered to mask with P3-level filter from a portable oxygen cylinder. A nonrebreathing mask with a reservoir bag was attached to the P3 filter. The oxygen flow rate should be adjusted according to different minute volumes.

References


(Accepted for publication August 11, 2003.)
To the Editor:—Airway management is a major responsibility for the anesthesia personnel. Patients with obvious signs suggestive of difficult direct laryngoscopy and intubation (i.e., orofacial abnormalities, short thick neck, protruding teeth, high arches palate, and others) are usually treated with extreme caution. However, some patients who appear normal on conventional examination may still present an unanticipated difficult airway. It is all the more alarming in morbidly obese patients who have a higher-than-usual incidence of difficult mask ventilation and precipitous oxygen desaturation.1 Here I present a case of unanticipated difficult intubation in a morbidly obese patient in whom the difficulty in performing direct laryngoscopy and intubation was a direct result of the altered neck extension and mouth opening resulting from a change in the position of the patient from the sitting to the supine position.

A 35-yr-old African-American man (weight, 190 kg; height, 178 cm) presented for gastric bypass surgery under general anesthesia. He had no significant medical history. His preoperative airway examination revealed relatively large face, a thick neck, adequate mouth opening (> 4 cm), and intact upper and lower dentition with no evidence of overbite. He was assigned an airway Mallampati score of II. He had a full range of active neck flexion and extension. All examination was performed while the patient was in the sitting position. A doughnut-shaped pillow (10 cm thick) was placed under his head. Anesthesia was induced with thiopental sodium, and muscle relaxation for intubation was achieved with succinylcholine. Soon after fasciculation had passed, we faced significant difficulty extending the neck and opening his mouth. A slight extension at the neck allowed us to open the mouth enough to introduce the Macintosh No. 4 blade. Further attempts at neck extension were unsuccessful. The headboard of the operating table was lowered, with no improvement in neck extension. A roll of blanket was placed under the shoulder, which seemed to worsen the overall extension at the neck. At that point, the head was supported, and the intubation was accomplished successfully on the second attempt with only the posterior tip of the arytenoids visualized.

At the end of the surgical procedure, the patient was extubated while awake. On the third postoperative day, I reexamined the airway while the patient was in the sitting position, with no change in the findings. However, when he was asked to lie on the bed and open his mouth, he could open his mouth only while actively extending his head. On closer examination of his neck, it was clear that his skin and tissues at the back of his neck and, especially, the upper shoulder were thick and excessive. Interestingly, the full range of motion at the neck and adequacy of mouth opening was well preserved on asking the patient to perform these maneuvers while in the lateral position.

Various investigators have found that a Mallampati score of III or IV was a risk factor for difficult intubation.3 However, the sensitivity, specificity, and negative predictive value of the Mallampati score are poor. In addition, investigators have found no correlation between body mass index and difficult intubation in obese patients.4

Adequate mouth opening and neck mobility are the two most important variables defining ease of direct laryngoscopy and intubation.5 It is generally understood that these variables are well persevered in the supine position. Tham et al.,3 in their study evaluating the effect of posture on the Mallampati class, concluded that posture has no effect on the class assigned in the Mallampati test performed in the sitting position. It is well known that both Mallampati and the later suggested samsoon and Young modification indicate that these assessments should be performed with the patient in the sitting position.4

In the current case, a closer look revealed that as the patient was asked to lie down on the operating table, the tissues on the posterior upper aspect of the shoulder were squeezed in the direction of the back of the neck, thereby crowding the area behind the neck. This tissue at the back of the neck in the supine position seemed to restrict the extension at the neck whenever the patient was placed in the supine position with his shoulder positioned over the relatively hard operating room mattress. Interestingly, the patient could extend his neck to a greater extent when he was allowed to support his upper body on the elbows while in the supine position. Placing a roll of towels under the neck seemed to further limit the extension at the neck by facilitating the redistribution of the tissues to behind the neck.

Yet another interesting finding in this patient was our inability to open the mouth adequately when we placed him supine on the operating room table with his head resting on the doughnut-shaped pillow. The cause of this is unclear, although the patient could demonstrate adequate mouth opening in supine position for as long as he could extend his neck simultaneously. Theoretically, it is possible for the tissues in the neck, especially those in the posterior region of the neck (behind the angle of the mandible), to become crowded enough. Perhaps it is this change in the range of passive mobility at the atlantooccipital joint coupled with restricted jaw mobility in the anesthetized paralyzed patient placed in supine position, which may be one of the causes of unanticipated difficulty in intubation. Because during passive jaw opening the angle of the mandible moves backward, the ease of doing that depends in part on the softness of the tissues that it displaces. In my personal experience, I have encountered this problem most often in patients with thick muscular necks with prominent sternomcleidomastoilds. The difficult tracheal intubation is more common among obese than nonobese patients. Unfortunately, among the classic risk factors for difficult intubation, only a Mallampati score of III or IV has been identified as a risk factor in obese patients. It includes assessment of range of extension of the cervical spine, mobility at the temporomandibular joint, maximum mouth opening, and tongue size. Here I have identified other such factors, which may contribute to the increased incident of difficult laryngoscopy and intubation in a subset of obese patients. Consequently, I recommend that all obese patients and patients with thick, short necks be reevaluated while in the supine position for adequacy of range of motion and mouth opening to avoid unanticipated difficult airway on induction.

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(Accepted for publication February 13, 2004.)

Support was provided solely from institutional and/or departmental sources.