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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Alypin: An Antithetical Anesthetic



The name of alypin, a local anesthetic synthesized in 1905 as a substitute for cocaine, derived from the Greek word *alypeo*, meaning “free from pain.” Touted as cheaper, safer, and easier to sterilize than cocaine, alypin gained popularity in ophthalmology, otolaryngology, and dentistry. In spite of its etymology, however, alypin was not quite pain free. Infiltration could be caustic, triggering tissue injury. Oral administration left a bitter taste; surplus nasolacrimal drainage from alypin eye drops was thus unpalatable. While alypin, unlike cocaine, did not cause mydriasis, it could still irritate the cornea, inducing hyperemia and turbidity. Its failure to live up to its name was pronounced in urology, where urethral administration led to several fatal or near-fatal cases. Unmitigated local anesthetic toxicity—with hallucinations, seizures, apnea, and even cardiac arrest—could suddenly ensue. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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