Inferior Vena Cava Occlusion in Late Pregnancy and Its Importance in Anaesthesia

Sir,—Dr. Scott (Brit. J. Anaesth., 1968, 40, 120) states that vasopressors should be avoided following spinal and epidural anaesthesia in the pregnant patient at term. The reason given is the distinct possibility of hypertension occurring following delivery. He suggests that when symptoms of acute hypotension develop “such as faintness, nausea and vomiting” the patient should be “encouraged with the assurance that these symptoms will quickly disappear once the baby is delivered”. In my experience such encouragement has never alleviated the symptoms. While recognizing the danger of hypertension in these circumstances, may I describe a technique which I feel allows one to “have one’s cake and eat it too”.

An intravenous infusion is started prior to the spinal or epidural injection. A second solution containing 20 mg metaraminol (Aramine) in 500 ml is prepared and connected “side saddle” to the original infusion. At the first sign of hypotension after induction of anaesthesia the metaraminol is started. The rate of infusion is determined by the response of the blood pressure. It is usually possible to stop the metaraminol some time prior to the delivery of the baby but in any event the baby should be delivered, and thus speedy delivery should be carried out. This should seldom take longer than 5 minutes with a competent obstetrician. Elevation of the blood pressure with a vasopressor relieves symptoms of hypotension, but may lead to a false sense of security that all is well with the circulation when in fact cardiac output is dangerously low. It is better to treat a mechanical occlusion medically rather than pharmacologically. D. B. Scott

Edinburgh

The Use of Pethidine and Morphine in the Presence of Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors

Sir,—I believe—and hope—that I am not numbered among the mealy-mouthed. I favour the enthusiastic injection of the scientific spirit into clinical medicine, yet I must confess that Dr. Evans-Prosser’s article in the April issue (Brit. J. Anaesth., 1968, 40, 279) caused me some unease. The subjects of the investigation were psychiatric in-patients. In common, doubtless, with the majority of your readers, I am totally ignorant of the factors which govern the admission of patients to psychiatric wards, and of the medical conditions which pertain in the departments concerned. However, one surely must assume, unless told otherwise, that these subjects were considered—by virtue of their degree of mental instability—to be unfit to carry on an existence outside of hospital and to receive out-patient therapy. In addition, all the subjects investigated had for several weeks received twice-daily doses of at least one tranquilizer, which presumably interfered to some extent with their critical faculties and their ability to reject the investigator’s invitation. With this in mind, it seems to me that Dr. Evans-Prosser dismissed in a rather cavalier fashion the question of consent with the note that “The patients were all considered capable of understanding the nature of the trial and their part in it. Only one declined.”

I do not wish to be offensive in this matter, but we are all only too well aware of the campaigns which are being mounted against research in the context of
clinical medicine. Whilst I am sure that Dr. Evans-Prosser took all the correct precautions and submitted his protocol to the appropriate psychiatric authorities before commencing his study, I feel that his report as it stands is too easily open to misinterpretation, and that he should have made more plain the basis upon which the acceptability of patient-consent rested. Incidentally, would not out-patients receiving monoamine oxidase inhibitors have served as well?

J. SELWYN CRAWFORD
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Sir,—I appreciate Dr. Crawford's anxiety. It was realized at the outset that this would be an important problem and in order to minimize any misunderstanding by the patients or any "pressurizing" on my part, each patient was interviewed by me in the presence of the Sister or Nurse in charge. Psychiatric nursing staff are highly trained and used to taking responsibility for their patients, and one of the main objects of their presence at this preliminary interview was to make sure that they, as well as I, were convinced that the patients understood what it was all about. The psychiatric registrar was always available for an opinion if either I or the nurse was in any doubt, but in no case did we feel it necessary to ask him.

With regard to out-patients, the matter of consent would be identical and the administrative problem involved in carrying out the investigation would be vastly increased.

C. D. G. EVANS-PROSSER
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Printed in Great Britain by John Sherratt & Son Ltd., Park Road, Aberfoyle.