CORRESPONDENCE

THE EMPHYSEMATOUS PATIENT

Sir,—In Dr. Nunn's article on "The Anaesthetist and the Emphysematous Patient" (Brit. J. Anaesth., 1958, 30, 134), he suggests that halothane might prove a satisfactory inhalation agent for emphysematous patients.

Certainly, its nonirritant properties and the fact that only low concentrations are needed, even in the presence of a large functional residual capacity, are both attractive features.

However, there appear to be two disadvantages. Firstly, halothane is usually given with a very high percentage of oxygen which thus weakens the "anoxic drive" needed by these patients. Secondly, halothane itself is a respiratory depressant.

If spontaneous respiration is to persist then the oxygen content of the inhaled gases should be reduced by a diluent—and what better one than nitrous oxide.

The calibrated inhaler for Fluothane, manufactured by the British Oxygen Company, gives readings relative only to oxygen flows. The company, however, say that diluting the oxygen flow with nitrous oxide does not influence the calibration of this inhaler. The use of it in this way seems to me to be a sensible procedure for the emphysematous patient. Obviously the nitrous oxide will have a potentiating effect on the strength of the mixture, which must be taken into account.

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TERMINOLOGY AND SYMBOLS USED IN RESPIRATORY PHYSIOLOGY

Sir,—I do not feel very strongly about most of the questions raised by Dr. Mapleson in his letter to the journal (Brit. J. Anaesth., 1958, 30, 202). I see no reason, for example, why italics should not be used instead of Roman type. On the other hand, the rare and trivial case where an italic I is preferable does not make the issue a burning one. Indeed, few people would notice such a change.

The "on the line" subscript does have some advantages when multiple subscripts are used. On the other hand, Dr. Mapleson has pointed out a disadvantage. So far as I know, however, no one has yet mistaken a subscript for a multiplying factor. The use of a dot to represent a time derivative certainly has disadvantages when applied to intermittent processes as pointed out by Dr. Mapleson. His solution to the problem—namely to use a different symbol for intermittent gas flow—seems perfectly justifiable to me. As pointed out in the report of our committee, new symbols are easily added to the list without altering the method of symbolization.

In summary, I do not see that Dr. Mapleson's suggestions would change matters much—the shift to italics would scarcely be noticeable. It is my personal opinion that the present method of presenting subscripts is somewhat simpler to read when multiple subscripts are used, but I would not object violently if this were abandoned. I think all members of our committee were surprised and pleased at the almost universal acceptance and use of the present symbols in so many countries and languages. Many journals have used the symbols during the past eight years.

This is not to say, however, that improvements cannot be made.

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