ACID ASPIRATION SYNDROME

Sir,—I have just re-read the paper by Hester and Heath (1977) and realize that they have misquoted our work (Hutchinson and Newson, 1975). They state that mortality from pulmonary acid aspiration syndrome in all hospitals in Auckland between 1967 and 1969 was 1 in 11 000 of non-obstetric patients. In fact, 1 in 11 000 was the frequency of severe pulmonary acid aspiration syndrome in all operative cases during that 3-yr period, including obstetric patients. The mortality (which regrettably was not quoted in our paper) was 10% of the morbidity, or 1 in 110 000, before the use of magnesium trisilicate mixture.

In the 3-yr period 1970–72, when magnesium trisilicate was coming into routine use, the frequency of severe pulmonary acid aspiration syndrome in all operative cases (including obstetrics) was 1 in 40 000. The mortality was 1 in 120 000, which one must admit was not very different from the period before antacid therapy. It is interesting to note that none of our 13 patients with severe acid aspiration syndrome during the 6 years had received antacid before anaesthesia.

Currently we are analysing the frequency of Mendelson's syndrome during the years 1973–78, and this should indicate if the routine administration of a magnesium trisilicate mixture before operation has been justified.

B. R. Hutchinson
Auckland, New Zealand

REFERENCES


Sir,—We hope that Drs Hutchinson and Newson will forgive us for our carelessness in substituting mortality for frequency. We apologize unreservedly.

It is interesting to note the apparent failure of magnesium trisilicate therapy to reduce significantly the mortality rate from acid aspiration.

We await the results from New Zealand with interest to see if they do indeed confirm that magnesium trisilicate, as well as being cheap and safe, is actually effective. It is possible that the anaesthetic mortality survey (Scott, 1978) to be undertaken under the auspices of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland may produce comparable information in Great Britain.

M. L. Heath
J. B. Hester
London

DIFFICULT INTUBATION

Sir,—In response to the correspondence by Dr Dennison (1978) on intubation of a patient with Still's disease, I should like to describe a recent case of difficulty in endotracheal intubation at the University of Tübingen.

A young 24-year-old female patient suffering from generalized fibromatosis presented for extensive surgery of the upper and lower jaws combined with multiple dental extractions. All the muscles of the patient were of bone-like consistency andankylosis of the temporo-mandibular joints did not allow separation of the teeth by as much as 1 mm. There was no movement of the cervical spine and the larynx was completely imobile.

Anaesthesia was induced with small quantities of etomidate which permitted good spontaneous ventilation. A soft latex armoured tube was well lubricated and passed through the nose and pharynx (which had been anaesthetized previously with local anaesthetic) until respiratory sounds were heard maximally through the tube. At this point, a lignocaine aerosol spray was passed through the tube and approximately 80 mg of lignocaine introduced, producing paralysis of the vocal cords within 2–3 min. This allowed subsequent easy blind nasal intubation in the anaesthetized patient breathing spontaneously. Insertion of the tube into the larynx was accomplished by rotation and advancement with the guide of breath sounds.

J. Hausdorfer
Tübingen, West Germany

REFERENCE


ENDOTRACHEAL INTUBATION IN STILL'S DISEASE

Sir,—If the arthritic patient referred to by Dr Dennison (1978) had presented only for tracheal intubation, then he and his colleagues could be applauded for their perseverance. As the patient required hip surgery, they should have considered alternatives to endotracheal anaesthesia. Spinal or extradural anaesthesia provide good operating conditions for hip replacement and are usually possible even with advanced arthritis of the spine.

Local anaesthesia would have avoided the measures described, which carried the potential risk of endangering the larynx and subluxing the odontoid peg.

As Aesop might have said: “If at first you don't succeed, discretion is the better part of valour.”

J. David Greaves
Queensland, Australia

REFERENCE


Sir,—Thank you for the opportunity to reply to the letter of Dr Greaves. I do not agree that a technique of extradural or spinal analgesia could ever be as satisfactory or safe as general anaesthesia for hip replacement. Patients prefer general anaesthesia. Local anaesthetic techniques are not always successful, and they may be impossible to perform. Analgesia may not last the duration of surgery, “topping up” may be dangerous after bleed loss, the inevitable hypotension is dangerous in the elderly, and anticoagulants are often present. In addition, intubation should always be available when the technique is used.

While aware of the possibility of subluxation of the odontoid peg in patients with rheumatoid arthritis, I have not seen this condition in many years, or heard of a case other than in patients suffering from trauma.