SPINAL ANAESTHESIA AND CARDIAC DISEASE

Sir,—May I take issue with Dr Mostafa as to the suitability of spinal anaesthesia for the management of Caesarean section in the patient with severe cardiac disease (Mostafa, 1984)?

Extradural blockade has rightly been advocated in the management of patients with cardiac disease for labour (Ostheimer and Alper, 1975) and Caesarean section (McMurray and Kenny, 1982; Linter and Clarke, 1984). This is because, by careful incremental dosage, the block can be instituted with minimal cardiovascular disturbance.

This is precisely what you cannot do with spinal anaesthesia.

In a patient with limited cardiac output and pulmonary oedema, the circulation is being supported by endogenous catecholamines. The rapid onset of spinal blockade is extremely likely to result in hypotension. Pulmonary oedema will be exacerbated by the supine position. Hypoxia and restlessness will be common and difficult to manage. Dr Mostafa found that, by attention to detail, you can avoid these problems in some patients some of the time—but you cannot expect to avoid them in all the patients all of the time (Clark, Thompson and Thompson, 1976; Crawford, 1978).

The advantage of a careful, monitored general anaesthetic in these circumstances lies in the ease with which crises can be managed when they occur. In contrast to spinal anaesthesia, ventilation and oxygenation may be optimised, central venous catheters can be inserted and inotropic agents given.

Lunn and Mushin (1982) in their study "Mortality Associated with Anaesthesia" found that errors in the administration of spinal and extradural anaesthetics caused a disproportionately large number of anaesthetic deaths. They commented that: "There is no evidence that a method which abolishes autonomic and sensory response to surgery is particularly beneficial to the poor risk or moribund patient in, or on the verge of, cardiorespiratory failure. Indeed simple logic suggests that this would be a poor choice in these circumstances".

I agree.

G. D. Prince
Newcastle

REFERENCES


