In Reply—We appreciate the interest of Dr. Blumenthal et al. in our case report on intraneural administration of local anesthetic during an anterior approach of the sciatic nerve. We agree completely with these authors but would like to clarify a few details.

Our patients had been included in a study intended to evaluate the accessibility of the sciatic nerve using the anterior approach. We aimed at determining the reliability and stability of the catheter for postoperative analgesia in this approach. Despite this explanation of why we conducted these blocks in the computerized tomographic radiologic room, we believe that the near future will see an increasing participation of neuroimaging techniques in helping with anesthetic block complications. Moreover, the sciatic nerve is hidden behind the minor trochanter in a nonnegligible proportion of patients (10%).

The structure of the nerve trunk is complex. The nerve fibers are arranged in bundles (fascicles) that are surrounded by the epineurium, the perineurium, and the endoneurium. The epineurium is the outermost sheath of the nerve trunk and is composed of dense, lamellated, fibrous tissue. The perineurium is a thinner, less dense sheath that surrounds the endoneurium, which contains the individual nerve fibers (axons).

In our case report, we inserted the catheter through the anterior approach and administered local anesthetics. We did not use any imaging techniques during the procedure. However, we did use computed tomographic imaging after the procedure to confirm the catheter's position. We did not use nerve stimulation to confirm needle placement, as mentioned by the authors.

We agree with Blumenthal et al. that the catheter's position should be confirmed using imaging techniques, especially in cases where the sciatic nerve is hidden behind the minor trochanter. This ensures the safety of the patient and the success of the procedure.

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epineurium is a slack collagen and fatty tissue, which contains the vasa and nervi nervorum.4–6 Most of the nerve section (between 30–75%) is occupied by nonneuronal structures.5,9 The sciatic nerve produces abundant epineurium, which covers between 72 and 78% of the nerve section.10

Intraepineural injection of anesthetic would not necessarily lead to nerve damage.11 On the contrary, intrafascicular injection is more likely to induce nerve lesions.12 However, because of their elastic properties, the fascicles probably separate from each other and get out of the way if a needle penetrates the nerve trunk. Although direct neural tissue lesion is unlikely, it should be taken into account that intraepineural injection of a substance can cause an increase in neural pressure and secondary damage because of compression or a vascular lesion.

Clinical experience supports neurostimulation as a safe and effective technique with minimal incidence of nerve lesions. However, a large number of unresolved questions stemming out from our observations remain: How often does intraepineural injection occur in routine practice? Does it occur preferentially in certain nerves? What are the clinical and radiologic signs suggesting intraepineural puncture? What is the safe threshold for electrical near-nerve stimulation?

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Management of Anaphylactic Shock

To the Editor.—It was interesting to read the recent case report by Schummer et al.1 regarding management of anaphylactic shock. The use of vasopressin in anaphylactic shock is commendable. However, before the use of vasopressin, two steps in the management of anaphylactic shock must be addressed. First, the simple measure of elevating the lower limbs could have helped to increase the venous return with vasodilatation, thereby contributing to an increase in blood pressure. This measure is well recommended in the management of anaphylactic shock.2–4

Second, all colloids have been shown to produce clinical anaphylaxis. The overall incidence has been estimated to range between 0.033 and 0.22%.5 The last French survey of anaphylaxis during anesthesia demonstrated that 2.95% of anaphylactic cases were due to colloids.5,9 The incidence of anaphylaxis with succinylated gelatin solution (Gel-fusal®; Serumwerk Bernburg AG, Bernburg, Germany) is 0.34%, whereas with hydroxystarch starch (HES), it is one sixth of this, i.e., 0.06%.9 HES seems to be the safest colloid, and the incidence of immunoglobulin G antibodies against HES is rare in the general population.9 However, this does not preclude the absolute safety of HES. Isotonic crystalloids are the recommended fluids during anaphylaxis, and rapid infusion of 1–4 l may be required to compensate for the peripheral vasodilatation that often accompanies anaphylaxis. The American Heart Association (Dallas, Texas), in collaboration with the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (Antwerp, Belgium), has endorsed the use of isotonic crystalloids in anaphylactic shock.4,5

Although immediate discontinuation of the offending drug, Gel-fusal®, was justified,2,5 we are skeptical of its replacement with other colloids with the potential, albeit low, for anaphylaxis. Patients might have developed anaphylaxis to HES, thereby obtunding the response to the conventional drugs, via epinephrine and steroids. Although the authors performed skin testing for gelatin, no skin or immunologic test such as enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay for reactive antibodies to HES was performed to rule out its allergy.7

Last but not least, minimal invasive direct coronary artery bypass grafting does not preclude the possible use of cardiopulmonary bypass. Considering the recent warning by the US Food and Drug Administration (Rockville, Maryland) regarding use of HES for cardiopulmonary bypass, its use over crystalloids does not seem to be justified in this case.8

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In Reply.—We thank Drs. Mahajan and Gupta for their interest in our case report and appreciate the opportunity to reply.

Drs. Mahajan and Gupta obviously believe in algorithms. However, the complexity and severity of anaphylaxis is such that no single algorithm can adequately treat all cases. Anaphylaxis is generally an unanticipated severe allergic reaction, often rapid in onset, and starts within seconds to minutes after exposure to the allergen. Symptoms progress rapidly, can affect most organ systems, and can lead to cardiovascular collapse and death, even when appropriately treated. The management of anaphylaxis consists of withdrawing the offending drug, interrupting the effects of the preformed mediators that were released in response to the antigen, and preventing more mediator release.

The intention of our case report was to adjoin a practicable method to the management of anaphylaxis by considering the application of vasopressor to standard therapy as an approach for mediator-induced vasodilatory shock and not to add on a discussion about the right colloid.3

Yes, effective fluid therapy is a mainstay of treating critically ill patients. The ideal kind of volume replacement in this situation remains a matter of debate. Despite an immense number of contributions to this problem, there is no answer yet. This topic is often discussed emotionally rather than scientifically. The ideal solution should not only maintain gross hemodynamics, but organ perfusion and microcirculation should also be guaranteed or even improved. To treat hypovolemia, in Germany, colloids are used more often than crystalloids. The lack of acceptance of synthetic colloids such as hydroxyethyl starch (HES) as a solution for volume replacement is most likely due to reports on abnormal coagulation function. This cannot be used as an argument when new, modern HES preparations with low molecular weights (70,000 or 200,000 Da) and a low degree of substitution (0.5) are used. This is the commonly used priming solution of the cardiovascular bypass machine at our institution.2,5

In clinical practice, with the given situation of a high-risk patient with cardiovascular disease, being placed on the operation table for minutes insidiously direct coronary artery bypass grafting, elevation of the legs and head-down tilt is not a suitable therapeutic option. Infusion of up to 4 l of a crystalloid is time-consuming and might end in fluid overload.

There was no need for skin testing of HES because further infusions did not provoke anaphylactic reactions. Furthermore, the cause of adverse reactions due to HES is not yet clear. Major histamine release is not known to occur.4 In a multicenter, prospective trial, 200,906 infusions of colloid volume substitutes have been examined. The frequency of severe reactions (shock, cardiac and/or respiratory arrest) was 0.006% for HES.5 HES-reactive antibodies are extremely rare, and they do not necessarily induce anaphylaxis.6 Also, there is no known cross-reactivity between the different colloids, so a particular allergy to one should not preclude the use of a different colloid.7

Tachycardia, a common symptom in anaphylaxis, may have devastating consequences, especially in patients with cardiovascular disease, and should be terminated as soon as possible. High-dose epinephrine, administered with the intention to stabilize hemodynamics, may cause cardiac fibrillation, whereas vasopressin increases perfusion pressures and has an antitachycardic effect.8

Since the publication of our case report, we have gained more experience with the use of vasopressin in the management of anaphylactic shock beyond standard therapy. Administration of vasopressin, regardless of the causing agent (e.g., antibiotics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), always stabilized hemodynamics quickly: The need for epinephrine reduced dramatically, and the heart rate normalized.

The management of anaphylactic shock must be immediate because time is running against the patient. Restoring cerebral and coronary perfusion quickly plays a pivotal role; therefore, one should consider the early addition of vasopressin complementary to standard therapy.

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anesthetics. Alternatively, it was not the bupivacaine *per se* that caused the CES, but something associated with the performance of the spinal anesthesia or with patient selection.

Moen et al. report the following large groups of complications (in addition to other but fewer complications): 33 spinal hematomas, 32 cases of CES, and 29 cases of purulent meningitis. Although the authors allot approximately 1,200 words to spinal hematoma, they expend only 272 words on CES. Furthermore, the authors mention the cases of CES only in the results section and provide no insight in the discussion regarding the "process of care" that resulted in the 11 cases of bupivacaine CES or a possible etiology. It is easy to assume that CES in this study resulted from local anesthetic toxicity, but as the authors point out in their conclusion, "Spinal stenosis can by itself cause spontaneous paraplegia, but if preceded by [central neuraxial blockade], the blockade will most probably be blamed." My complaint is in keeping with the editorial that accompanied the article of Moen et al., which states, "Behind the outcome is the process of care, and we must move from the question ‘What happened?’ to ‘Why did it happen?’" Thus, the authors missed an opportunity to report on the "process of care" that resulted in previously unreported or underreported cases of bupivacaine CES of which they now hold the largest database.

It is not too late, however, and I would be pleased to have the authors provide more detail regarding the serious complication of the so-called bupivacaine CES. By informing us of the "process of care" or "what happened" in these cases, we may be able to prevent future occurrences.

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Why Do Orthopedic Patients Have a Higher Incidence of Serious Complications after Central Neuraxial Blockade?

To the Editor:—The authors should be congratulated on their comprehensive work “Severe Neurological Complications after Central Neuraxial Blockades in Sweden 1990–1999.” A variety of biases, which usually are inherent in such study designs, were successfully controlled. Considering previous data from the 1990s, the current incidence of complications is alarmingly high, but it stands in line with most recent respective surveys.

One question, however, deserves discussion. The authors described significantly higher incidence of spinal hematomas in the population of orthopedic patients, but the underlying causes remain partially unexplained. The authors presume that the high incidence may be related to low-molecular-weight heparin administration, which was introduced for thromboembolism prophylaxis during the study period.

In an 8 yr survey regarding serious complications after regional anesthesia at our institution, we observed three spinal epidural hematomas in 28,933 central neuraxial blocks, of which two occurred in the subgroup of orthopedic patients (n = 4,205), indicating similar incidences and risk factors as reported by Moen et al. One of the hematomas was previously reported elsewhere, and the second one occurred after spinal anesthesia in a patient treated with unfractionated heparin. Both patients were concomitantly treated with nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which were not considered a risk factor at that time. The third hematoma developed in a patient with heparin-induced thrombocytopenia during postoperative epidural pain therapy after hemipatectomy. No hematoma occurred in urologic (n = 10,817) or obstetric (n = 4,250) patients.

The discussion about the risk of spinal hematoma in patients with NSAID (antiplatelet) therapy remains controversial. In orthopedic patients treated with aspirin, Horlocker et al. did not observe an increased risk of spinal hematoma during spinal anesthesia. However, in 1984, Cronberg et al. reported on the effects of NSAIDs on the second wave of aggregation, which was considered a key issue in our patient. In urologic patients (no hematoma in 10,817 neuraxial blocks), the risk profile regarding comorbidity and comedication is comparable to that of orthopedic patients, with the exception of concomitant therapy with NSAIDs.

We believe that the combination of heparin and NSAIDs in orthopedic patients is responsible for the higher risk of spinal hematoma in this group as compared with obstetric patients. Because pain therapy with NSAIDs is widespread in patients in need of (orthopedic) hip or knee joint replacement surgery, it would be of interest if the authors could provide any information regarding the concomitant use of NSAIDs in their cohort of orthopedic patients.

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To the Editor:—We strongly support reporting systems and therefore read with interest the Editorial View by Auroy et al.1 However, before these methods become a standard audit or educational tool, some of their limitations must be considered further.

Clinicians can often select the type of adverse incident or outcome they will record. These tend to be those that are more severe, or those in accordance with individual perspectives of safety.2,3 For example, prolonged paralysis after a regional block is more likely to be reported than transitory paresthesia. Temporary complications are often ignored, despite their potential educational value. Sometimes, reporters select those incidents most likely to carry a message to the organization’s management.4 Incidents over inappropriate waiting times for patients or surgeons are not exceptional in anesthetic incident–reporting systems. Such selection and reporting biases may seriously distort perception of safety problems in anesthesia.

When reporting systems focus on near misses (prevented or mitigated adverse events), another difficulty arises, one familiar to aviation safety experts: information overload.4 A progressively larger amount of data is collected and stored to be further analyzed. It can become increasingly difficult and costly to classify and retrieve meaningful events in such an extensive system analysis.5 Gradually limited by resources and complexity, experts may end up fixing near misses instead of addressing system errors concealed behind the data overload. This may jeopardize the didactic value of such events.

Finally, anesthetic and medical practices in general are largely controlled by a professional body of knowledge.6 Organizational guidelines and standards are much less the norm than, for example, in chemical or nuclear industries.7 Variability in local practices, professional culture, and political context seriously challenge the generalizability of organizational analysis.

To address these problems, suggested approaches could include the use of international standardized definitions of incidents and the development of guided reporting through generic adverse event indicators. The specificities of the healthcare organization analyzed could also be more systematically described and addressed.

If limitations such as these are not well understood and properly addressed, case reports and root cause analyses of adverse incidents and near misses are likely to remain largely narrative and of limited educational value within the broader anesthetic community.

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Stellate Ganglion Blockade for Acute Postoperative Upper Extremity Pain

To the Editor—We read with interest the review article by Dr. Reuben entitled “Preventing the Development of Complex Regional Pain Syndrome after Surgery.” The author mentioned that in his practice, he administers a stellate ganglion block to patients with a history of complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) undergoing upper extremity surgical procedures in an effort to prevent its recurrence. Although the literature supports this practice, the efficacy of a stellate ganglion block has broader applications to patients without a history of CRPS. No study has examined its use in the acute postoperative setting. Nevertheless, we report the first case using a stellate ganglion block to treat acute postoperative pain successfully in a patient without a history of CRPS who underwent an open reduction and internal fixation of a left humerus fracture. The 5-h intraoperative course was uneventful during a 5% desflurane in 50% nitrous and 100% oxygen anesthetic. Fentanyl, 500 μg, and 5 mg morphine were also given intraoperatively. In the postanesthesia care unit, an additional 20 mg morphine was titrated for pain relief, although to no avail. The patient’s pain score remained 10 out of 10. On further evaluation, his left upper extremity appeared cold, clammy, and edematous, whereas the pain characteristic was described as burning.

After informed consent, a left stellate ganglion block was performed using 10 ml bupivacaine, 0.25%, with a sterile technique. Pain relief (0 out of 10) was achieved 5 min after injection. Evidence of successful blockade included ptosis and miosis, temperature increase in the left upper extremity, and an increase in perfusion index.

Numerous publications in the literature support the use of a stellate ganglion block for chronic sympathetically mediated pain; however, to the best of our knowledge, we report the first case in which a stellate ganglion block was used in the acute postoperative setting. Furthermore, the success of the block in absence of a history of CRPS illustrates primary prevention—interventions to prevent a disease from

David C. Warlick, M.D., Ph.D., acted as Handling Editor for this Correspondence.

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occurring. Activation of the sympathetic pain pathways could have taken place before the patient’s operating room visit or even intraoperatively. Nevertheless, the challenge is to recognize the clinical symptoms that differentiate acute CRPS from postsurgical pain, despite the close resemblance. Further review of the case revealed that the patient’s fracture was a week old, which may have contributed to an alteration of central nociceptive processing pathways, thus increasing his risk for development of postsurgical CRPS. Overall, we share the same enthusiasm of Dr. Ruben on regional anesthetic techniques to prevent the occurrence of CRPS. In our clinical practice, it is not only important to focus on CRPS prevention, but also to understand the pathophysiology so that we know which patients are at greatest risk.

In Reply—I appreciate the comments by Drs. Kakazu and Julka. Although the role of the sympathetic nervous system in certain chronic pain states, including complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), has been well documented, its role in acute pain and inflammation is still controversial. A coupling between the sensory afferent and sympathetic efferent system after peripheral nerve lesions has been previously described as a causative mechanism for neuropathic pain, including CRPS. However, the role of the sympathetic nervous system in acute pain still must be elucidated. The sympathetic nervous system may influence the nociceptive response to acute tissue injury in two ways. First, there is a potentiation of the chemical mediator cascade after trauma as well as augmentation of sensitization to substance P. Second, norepinephrine and α2 agonism in the dorsal horn neurons and in the locus ceruleus in the medulla play a major role in the descending medullospinal inhibition of nociception. Experimental studies in rats indicate that sympathetic postganglionic neurons may be involved in the generation of pain, hyperalgesia, and inflammation after tissue damage or trauma. Sensitization of nociceptive afferent fibers in the knee joints of rats involves a cascade of events in which the mast cell and the sympathetic terminal are sequentially activated, resulting in plasma extravasation in the synovium. Further, adrenal medullary-derived epinephrine can exacerbate and surgical or pharmacologic sympathectomy can decrease the severity of experimental arthritis. Although these behavioral studies in rats point to a potential role of the sympathetic nervous system in acute inflammatory pain, neurophysiologic studies of nociceptors in rats and psychophysical studies in humans have failed to provide confirmatory evidence for the role of sympathetic efferents in inflammatory pain and hyperalgesia.

The use of a stellate ganglion block for acute postoperative pain as described by Drs. Kakazu and Julka is intriguing. I agree with the authors that because this patient sustained his fracture 1 week before surgical correction, prolonged sensitization and alteration of nociceptive afferent pathways may have increased the risk for the development of postsurgical CRPS. However, the authors did not report whether this patient had any clinical symptoms consistent with CRPS before surgical intervention. Perhaps the surgical intervention exacerbated an underlying disease process that may have been initiated before surgery. Interestingly, since the success of our original report on the efficacy of stellate ganglion blocks for CRPS patients undergoing surgery, many of our surgeons now request that we routinely perform this sympathetic block for non-CRPS patients who are undergoing surgical procedures and are at increased risk for development of this disease. Although stellate ganglion block may be effective for treating acute postoperative neuropathic pain, it may also be useful in the management of acute nociceptive pain. Matsuura et al. describe the efficacy of stellate ganglion block in 29 patients undergoing ocular surgery. These authors report a significant reduction in postoperative pain and nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs with the use of stellate ganglion block. These case studies highlight the importance of moving from symptom control toward a mechanism-specific pharmacologic management of postoperative pain. We have only begun to identify the multiple neurobiologic mechanisms responsible for different pain states. We hope to be able to develop diagnostic tools that will allow us to identify these mechanisms in individual patients and target them with appropriate analgesic interventions. Future research is needed in defining the clinical significance of the interaction of the sympathetic nervous system and the somatic afferent system in the development of postoperative pain. At that time, we may have available not only the resources for eliminating acute pain but also the tools necessary for preventing the occurrence of chronic postsurgical pain.

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David C. Warthier, M.D., Ph.D., acted as Handling Editor for this Correspondence.
Air Venting and In-line Intravenous Fluid Warming for Pediatrics

To the Editor.—It is important to have suitable fluid warmers for pediatric anesthesia, especially in hypovolemic neonates and infants who require boluses of isotonic crystalloid, packed erythrocytes, or both given over 5–20 min. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the fluid warming and air venting capability of a new device (buddy fluid warmer; Belmont Instrument Corp., Billerica, MA) designed for use in pediatrics. With this device, fluids are heated to 38°C as they pass through a disposable set containing microporous membranes able to vent air. Air is released through the side vents of the set. The small heating unit and disposable set are placed in-line near the patient at the intravenous infusion site and can be used easily with volumetric infusion pumps.

Fluids tested were lactated Ringer’s solution, 1 l, at room temperature, and refrigerated, outdated erythrocytes diluted with 100 ml saline, 0.9%. The estimated hematocrit was 50%. Standard or Y-type blood solution sets were attached proximal to the commercial microheater disposable set (priming volume, 4 ml), which was connected to a 12.7 cm T connector (total volume, 0.4 ml). A rapid response thermocouple (Fluke 51 II; Fluke Corp., Everett, WA; accuracy, ±0.05%) was used to measure distal temperature at the point at which the T connector would be attached to the intravenous line. Temperature data were collected at 5 ml intervals for flows of 8 ml/min or greater and at 10+ intervals for slower flows. A volumetric infusion pump was used to regulate flow between 50 and 1,000 ml/h. For gravity-free flow, lactated Ringer’s solution was infused from a height of 1.8 m into a cylindrical scored beaker, and measurements were made every 50 ml. Pressure-driven flow was not used, per manufacturer guidelines.

A three-way stopcock with a 0.8 m extension was inserted proximal to the microheater, and a 22-gauge Angiocath (Becton Dickinson, Sandy, UT) was attached to the T connector distally. The Angiocath was submerged in a liquid-filled beaker for crystalloid infusion and attached to a cell salvage waste system for erythrocytes. Without the fluid warmer disposable set, injection of as little as 1 ml of air was readily visible in the liquid-filled beaker with submerged Angiocath. Aliquots of 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, and 60 ml of air were rapidly injected into the stopcock toward the patient infusion site, followed by resumption of fluid flow. Visual inspection for air bubbles distal to the warmer was performed by two observers. Tests were repeated twice for each condition and fluid.

Distal temperatures are summarized in figure 1. Air bubbles were not seen in the T connector or in the liquid-filled beaker for any value of injected air.

The buddy fluid warmer was effective in delivering warm intravenous fluids at flows of 7 ml/min or greater. At the slowest flows, infuse temperature decreased, likely resulting from significant heat loss distal to the warmer. Venting of air by the fluid warmer is of great advantage to pediatric patients with congenital heart disease. Moreover, use of this warming device might theoretically reduce the risk of accidental infusion of air during crystalloid and blood resuscitation of children with hypovolemic shock. The manufacturer’s list price for the buddy fluid warmer is $1,599.00; the disposable set is $14.99.

The authors thank Jeanne Javor, M.T. (A.S.C.P.), S.B.B. (Blood Bank Supervisor, MetroHealth Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio), for providing outdated erythrocytes and hematocrit estimates; Richard Kramer, C.P.P. (Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, MetroHealth Medical Center), for useful suggestions; and Denise Kosty Sweeney, R.N., M.S.N. (Administrative Nurse Manager, General Clinical Research Center, MetroHealth Medical Center), for the loan of a stopwatch and beaker.

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Fig. 1. Distal temperature (°C) of lactated Ringer’s solution (LR) and erythrocytes (RBC) at the point where fluid would enter the patient. Proximal crystalloid temperature was (mean ± SD) 16.5 ± 2°C. Proximal crystalloid temperature was 19.2 ± 1.2°C. Gravity flow from a height of 6 feet was 68 ± 10 ml/min, and distal temperature was 37.8°C. A minimum of 40 measurements were made for each flow (total of 1,216 measures).

Using the Bonfils Intubation Fiberscope with a Double-lumen Tracheal Tube

To the Editor.—Several surgical procedures require single-lung ventilation. Because a double-lumen tube (DLT) allows for independent ventilation therapy (e.g., continuous positive airway pressure), suctioning, and bronchoscopy of each lung, the DLT is the accepted standard for the treatment of patients undergoing thoracic surgery. A difficult intubation in this subset of patients is particularly challenging because tube insertion is impeded by the special shape of the DLT and the two separate cuffs, which can be damaged by the patient’s teeth and during repeated insertion maneuvers using intubation tools with sharp surfaces.

Recently, in two patients scheduled to undergo a minimally invasive direct coronary artery bypass procedure requiring DLT insertion, direct laryngoscopy failed. Because at our institution the Bonfils intubation fiberscope (Karl Storz GmbH, Tuttinglen, Germany), a rigid fiber-

Supported by the Department of Anesthesiology, MetroHealth Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio. Belmont Instrument Corporation, Billerica, Massachusetts, loaned the buddy fluid warmer and donated the microheater disposables.
To the Editor:—Ultrasound-guided regional anesthesia is an emerging field that potentially provides better block efficacy than other current techniques.1–5 In particular, ultrasound-guided axillary block had been described as an excellent technique for brachial plexus anesthesia.4,5 With this method, a short axis (transverse cross-sectional) view of the axillary artery and surrounding nerves is obtained with the block needle approaching from the lateral aspect of the arm in the plane of imaging. Although V-shaped redirection of the block needle can be used to place local anesthetic on the superficial and deep sides of the axillary artery, transarterial placement of the needle may occur during the procedure.

Fig. 1. Bonfils intubation fiberscope mounted with a 39-French left-sided double-lumen tube (Bronchocath; Mallinkrodt Medical, Athlone, Ireland). The tube connectors have been shortened to the appropriate length. Light source is powered by a battery handle.

During an ultrasound-guided axillary block, we observed a bent echo of the 25-gauge 3.8-cm Quincke tip needle (Becton Dickinson and Company, Franklin Lakes, NJ). The needle shaft echo was bent toward the skin surface when the needle crossed the axillary artery (fig. 1). When examined after the procedure, the injection needle was perfectly straight.

Described as a “bayonet artifact,” this ultrasound artifact causes apparent needle deformity and has been reported during breast biopsy in which a needle traverses a tumor surrounded by fat tissue.6 Bayonet artifact occurs when the ultrasound beam passes through tissues with different speeds of sound. Similar speed of sound artifacts have been described in the soft tissues of the kidney.7–9 Because all commercial ultrasound machines assume a uniform speed of sound of 1,540 m/s,10 actual differences among speeds of sound in tissue change the appearance of the needle on the ultrasound image.10

References


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Support was provided solely from institutional and/or departmental sources.

**Bayonet Artifact** during Ultrasound-guided Transarterial Axillary Block

During an ultrasound-guided axillary block, we observed a bent echo of the 25-gauge 3.8-cm Quincke tip needle (Becton Dickinson and Company, Franklin Lakes, NJ). The needle shaft echo was bent toward the skin surface when the needle crossed the axillary artery (fig. 1). When examined after the procedure, the injection needle was perfectly straight.

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Support was provided solely from institutional and/or departmental sources.
ent depth of received echoes. The speeds of sound among soft tissues may actually range from 1,450 m/s in fat to more than 1,600 m/s in muscle.10 Thus, clinical scanning can routinely produce speed of sound errors of approximately 5%.

This letter describes a bayonet artifact observed during regional anesthesia. The artifact occurred when the block needle passed through the axillary artery with the ultrasound beam nearly perpendicular to the needle. The speed of sound in whole blood (1,580 m/s) is higher than the average speed of sound in soft tissue (1,540 m/s).11 Therefore, bending of the needle echo toward the transducer was seen when the needle passed through the axillary artery.

Ultrasound guidance likely reduces the incidence of vascular puncture during regional block.12 However, inadvertent vascular puncture has been reported during peripheral nerve blocks despite use of ultrasound guidance.13,14 Therefore, bayonet artifacts from transarterial needle placement may occur during regional block even if vascular puncture was not intended.

The basic premise of the in-plane approach for ultrasound-guided regional blockade is that precise placement of the block needle tip near nerves is possible in real time. However, there are circumstances under which the actual needle position and perceived image do not agree. Here, we describe one of those circumstances that occurred during transarterial axillary block.

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