Routine Testing for Latex Allergy in Patients with Spina Bifida Is Not Recommended

To the Editor,—Moneret-Vautrin et al.,1 in their discussion of three cases of intraoperative anaphylaxis in children with spina bifida, state that "prick tests and RASTs are reliable for detecting latex allergy." They conclude that such tests should be performed preoperatively on all patients with spina bifida.

Unfortunately, there are no studies to support this statement. We do not yet know the prevalence of clinical rubber allergy in patients with spina bifida; recent surveys2 suggest that it is between 18 and 28%. Turjanmaa et al.,3 have found that the commercially available latex RAST is only 53% sensitive, and no sensitivity or specificity data are available for percutaneous latex testing. We therefore have no data whatever on the predictive value of these tests.

Until prospective studies identify the risk factors and predictors of intraoperative anaphylaxis, physicians must continue to rely on tools that are of demonstrated efficacy. We must obtain accurate histories from our patients, and carefully inquire of patients with spina bifida and their parents whether there have been any unusual, idiopathic, or perioperative allergic reactions in the past. Patients with such a history should be offered peroperative prophylaxis against immediate hypersensitivity reactions and should be spared, whenever possible, unnecessary cutaneous and parenteral exposure to natural rubber products.

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(Accepted for publication November 14, 1990.)