Cutaneous Monitoring of Carbon Dioxide Tension during Bronchoscopy in an Infant with Airway Obstruction

To the Editor:—Accurate monitoring of ventilation during diagnostic bronchoscopy for infants with stridor is difficult, and a significant degree of unrecognized hypoventilation can occur. Although continuous evaluation of arterial oxygen saturation is available with pulse oximetry, these devices do not indicate adequacy of ventilation. End-tidal CO₂ monitors are difficult to employ during the change from spontaneous awake ventilation, through assisted ventilation via a mask, to bronchoscopic ventilation. We report the application of cutaneous P₇⁰₀₂ (PtCO₂) monitoring during pediatric bronchoscopy in a patient with a subglottic hemangioma and compromised ventilation.

REPORT OF A CASE

A 4-month-old infant with stridor and moderate respiratory distress was scheduled for diagnostic rigid bronchoscopy. Thirty minutes prior to anesthetic induction, a cutaneous CO₂ electrode (Biolochem MicroSpan™) was placed on the infant’s chest. Monitoring while spontaneously breathing revealed a corrected PtCO₂ of 45 mmHg. Following 2 min of preoxygenation, halothane concentrations were incrementally increased to 3% while the infant maintained spontaneous ventilation. As the depth of anesthesia increased, the infant’s respiration became more labored with the respiratory rate increasing from 30 to >60 shallow breaths/min. Precordial stethoscope confirmed the presence of airflow, and pulse oximeter indicated 100% hemoglobin O₂ saturation. Nevertheless, corrected PtCO₂ steadily climbed from 45 to 65 mmHg. Placement of an oral airway had no effect on relieving airway obstruction. Because synchronizing assisted ventilation was difficult with this degree of tachypnea, a succinylcholine infusion was started and ventilation was easily controlled. Following insertion of the rigid bronchoscope, combined conventional positive pressure and high-frequency jet ventilation was applied through the bronchoscope as corrected PtCO₂ dropped to 35 mmHg over the next 2 min. A subglottic hemangioma was easily visualized, and following removal of the bronchoscope, the infant was intubated. Despite bilateral breath sounds, PtCO₂ began to rise, followed shortly afterward by a rapid decline in Hgb-O₂ saturation. Esophageal intubation was suspected and the patient was immediately reintubated with a 3.0 mm oral endotracheal tube which was subsequently replaced with a 3.5 mm nasotracheal tube following recovery of PtCO₂ and hemoglobin O₂ saturation. The remainder of the clinical course was uneventful.

DISCUSSION

We report the application of cutaneous P₇⁰₀₂ monitoring for pediatric bronchoscopy. These patients often have airway abnormalities that increase the risk of obstruction and hypoventilation during induction. In addition, use of a rigid Storz® bronchoscope with the Hopkin’s rod lens system results in a markedly diminished lumen for gas flow, severely restricting adequacy of ventilation. Cutaneous P₇⁰₀₂ monitoring provides a means to evaluate indirectly adequacy of ventilation because values correlate with Pa₇⁰₀₂.¹,² Volatile inhalational agents used intraoperatively do not interfere with the Stowe-Severinghaus-type electrode used in the PtCO₂ monitor.³ Some monitor-related measurement drift may occur in the course of monitoring; a calibration check performed following removal of the skin sensor indicated less than a 2 mmHg drift in our case. Although obtaining a Pa₇⁰₀₂ could be useful in establishing a relationship between P₇⁰₀₂ and PtCO₂, we chose to avoid arterial puncture and institute monitoring prior to surgery, establishing a baseline while the infant was spontaneously breathing. By comparing subsequent changes in PtCO₂ to baseline conditions, we were able to indentify periods of hypoventilation.

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REFERENCES


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