Millipore Filters are not Necessary for Epidural Block

To the Editor:—We have read with interest in the May 1981 issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY the articles regarding bacterial filters by Garibaldi et al.1 and Feeley et al.2, as well as the accompanying editorial by Dr. Mazze.3 We agree with Dr. Mazze that clinical practice is often influenced by considerations based on simplistic reasoning and not on substantial scientific data. The use of bacterial filters is one example of this attitude, and it is this issue we would like to address.

Theoretically, millipore filters with epidural analgesia serve two purposes: 1) to filter bacteria; and 2) to prevent foreign materials, such as glass particles, from gaining access to the epidural space. Two separate studies we conducted addressed these issues. In a double-blind study, we found that bacterial filters were not required if sound sterile techniques were applied.4 In another study, a filter needle used for aspirating the local anesthetic from the glass ampule was an adequate, cheaper, and less cumbersome means of protecting the epidural space.5

Following these findings, we stopped using millipore filters. From January 1977 through December 1980, 7,706 epidural and/or caudal blocks were performed in our hospital without any evidence of epidural infection and with significant savings in medical cost.

Our findings seem to have been overlooked in this recent discussion of bacterial filters3; perhaps they also have been ignored by others due to the widespread fear of infection and its subsequent medico-legal implications.

Our successful results, however, should encourage other anesthesiologists to abandon their overly cautious patterns and to adopt our techniques which are based on scientific data, rather than fear.

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Massive Weight Loss Will Improve Arterial Oxygenation in Selected Patients

To the Editor:—The recent article by Vaughan et al., "The Effect of Massive Weight Loss on Arterial Oxygenation and Pulmonary Function Tests," reported a slight, but statistically insignificant improvement in arterial oxygen tension (Pao2) following weight loss.1 The increased Pao2 was significantly correlated with an improved respiratory reserve volume. No change in forced vital capacity (FVC) or maximum voluntary ventilation (MVV) was seen. Their average preoperative Pao2 was 83.2 ± 2.5 torr and Paco2 was 36.8 ± 1.1 torr. The patients in the other studies to which these authors referred also did not have evidence of the obesity hypoventilation syndrome and had equivocal changes in Pao2, Paco2, and pulmonary function tests. Since these parameters were not markedly abnormal prior to surgery, it is not surprising that major changes were not seen. These studies do suggest, however, that weight loss might significantly improve ventilation in patients with obesity-induced pulmonary insufficiency.

We have recently reported the beneficial effects of weight loss following gastroplasty in three patients with the obesity hypoventilation syndrome and gastroplasty with tracheostomy in one patient with the sleep apnea syndrome.2 Since this report, we have operated on a fifth patient (W.G.) who was severely incapacitated with both. These patients tolerated surgery and anesthesia...
Use of a Flexible, Radiopaque Directable Catheter for Difficult Tracheal Intubations

To the Editor:—A variety of methods for managing the technically difficult endotracheal intubation have been described.1,2,* We wish to report another method of facilitating endotracheal intubation, which has proven to be successful when other maneuvers have failed. The technique makes use of a flexible, radiopaque, directable catheter inserted into the trachea under fluoroscopic control, in the spontaneously breathing patient.

In the radiology suite, a lubricated endotracheal tube of proper size is inserted through the nose and advanced into the posterior oropharynx in the usual manner. A flexible 65-cm steerable catheter with attached Medi-tech SH-4 control handle (7 French)† is then passed through the endotracheal tube. Under fluoroscopic visualization of the airway in the lateral projection, the catheter is advanced past the epiglottis and into the larynx with steering of the catheter as necessary (fig. 1). An anterior-posterior fluoroscopic projection is occasionally necessary if difficulty is encountered while advancing the catheter, due to lateral deviation of the tip into the pyriform recess. Upon directing the patient to suppress


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