

# Applied Physiology in Intensive Care Medicine

Michael R. Pinsky  
Laurent Brochard  
Jordi Mancebo  
*Editors*



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M.R. Pinsky · L. Brochard · J. Mancebo

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With 116 Figures and 21 Tables



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# Introduction

The practice of intensive care medicine is at the very forefront of titration of treatment and monitoring response. The substrate of this care is the critically ill patient who, by definition, is at the limits of his or her physiologic reserve. Such patients need immediate, aggressive but balanced life-altering interventions to minimize the detrimental aspects of acute illness and hasten recovery. Treatment decisions and response to therapy are usually assessed by measures of physiologic function, such as assessed by cardio-respiratory monitoring. However, how one uses such information is often unclear and rarely supported by prospective clinical trials. In reality, the bedside clinician is forced to rely primarily on physiologic principles in determining the best treatments and response to therapy. However, the physiologic foundation present in practicing physicians is uneven and occasionally supported more by habit or prior training than science.

A series of short papers published in Intensive Care Medicine since 2002 under the heading Physiologic Notes attempts to capture the essence of the physiologic perspectives that underpin both our understanding of disease and response to therapy. This present volume combines the complete list of these Physiologic Notes up until July 2006 with the associated review articles over the same interval that also addressed these central issues. This volume was created to address this fundamental unevenness in our understanding of applied physiology and underscore what is known and how measures and monitoring interact with organ system function and response to therapy. This collection of physiologic perspectives and reviews, written by some of the most respected experts in the field, represent an up-to-date and invaluable compendium of practical bedside knowledge essential to the effective delivery of acute care medicine. Although this text can be read from cover to cover, the reader is encouraged to use this text as a reference source reading individual Physiologic Notes and Review articles as they pertain to specific clinical issues. In that way the relevant information will have immediate practical meaning and hopefully become incorporated into routine practice.

We hope that the reader finds these papers and reviews useful in their practice and enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed editing the original articles that it comprises.

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## 1.1. Pulmonary

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## Intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP during controlled mechanical ventilation

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### Introduction

Extrinsic positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) applied to the patient at the airway opening is used artificially to increase end-expiratory lung volume. Extrinsic PEEP is increased or decreased in small increments in ventilator-dependent patients because of its marked effects on cardiorespiratory status. Unintentional or unmeasured end-expiratory hyperinflation, called intrinsic or auto-PEEP, can also occur and have similarly marked profound cardiorespiratory effects in ventilator-dependent patients during controlled mechanical ventilation. Ventilatory settings can interact with the passive process of expiration and generate intrinsic or auto-PEEP [1, 2].

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### What is intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP?

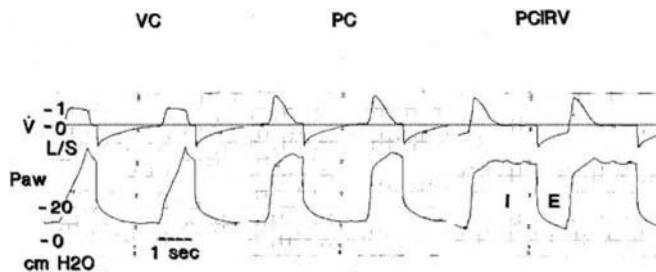
During passive expiration of the lungs the elastic forces of the respiratory system are the driving forces and can be described by the relationship between lung volume and the elastic recoil pressure of the respiratory system. The lower the elastic forces, or the higher the resistive forces, the longer will be the time needed to fully expire the inspired tidal volume. In a single-compartment model of the lung in which the lung behaves as if it has a single resistance and compliance, the volume at any given time during expiration ( $V$ ) is described by the monoexponential equation,  $V=V_0-Ve^{-kt}$ , where  $k$  is the time constant of the equation and is the product of resis-

tance times compliance (the reverse of elastance), and  $V_0$  is the end-inspiratory volume. In practical terms a time constant is the time required for the lungs to expire 63% of their initial volume. Thus the time needed passively to expire the inspired tidal volume is determined by the two main characteristics of the respiratory system: elastance and resistance. If expiration is interrupted before its natural end, i.e., by occurrence of the next inspiration, end-expiratory lung volume is higher than the so-called relaxation volume of the respiratory system, usually referred to as functional residual capacity. As a result the alveolar pressure at the end of expiration is higher than zero (zero being the atmospheric pressure), as predicted by the relationship between lung volume and the elastic recoil pressure of the respiratory system. This process is called dynamic hyperinflation, and the positive end-expiratory alveolar pressure associated with a higher than resting lung volume, is called intrinsic or auto-PEEP. Importantly for the clinician, this pressure is not directly measured at the airway opening and is thus not shown on the pressure dial of the ventilator. What the ventilator measures is the pressure in the ventilator circuit. Because the direction of the flow is still expiratory, the pressure measured by the ventilator at the end of expiration reflects only the relationship between flow and the resistance of the expiratory line, above the set PEEP. It does not give the clinician any information about the real alveolar pressure.

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### How one can suspect the presence of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP

The presence of a positive alveolar pressure higher than the atmospheric pressure or higher than the external PEEP set on the ventilator (which is a new “reference pressure” for the lungs) can be identified by inspection of the expiratory flow-time curve. When the expiratory time is sufficient for lung emptying, expiratory flow de-



**Fig. 1** Tracings of flow ( $\dot{V}$ ) and airway pressure ( $P_{aw}$ ) at the airway opening during volume controlled (VC), pressure-controlled (PC), and pressure-controlled inverse ratio ventilation (PCIRV). In the first two situations the expiratory flow declines gradually to zero; in the third case inspiration is lengthened by the inverse ratio setting and expiration shortened; the expiratory flow is abruptly interrupted, indicating the presence of dynamic hyperinflation and intrinsic or auto-PEEP. (From Lessard et al. [3])

clines from a maximum to zero or to the set PEEP. An interruption in this process results in an abrupt change in the slope of this curve, immediately continued by the next inspiratory flow. In other words, the next “inspiration” starts during “expiration.” Since the ventilator, which cannot generate flow into the patient’s lungs until the pressure at the airway opening exceeds the end-expiratory alveolar pressure, one way in which to measure intrinsic or auto-PEEP is to determine the airway pressure at the exact time of inspiratory flow. One can measure the intrinsic PEEP level by simultaneously recording airway pressure and flow data using a high-speed tracing. Figure 1 illustrates how shortening the expiratory phase generates such dynamic hyperinflation [3].

### Is the level of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP predictable?

If one assumes the respiratory system to be homogeneous and behave as a single compartment, a monoexponential equation can be used. By simple mathematics it takes three time constants (one being the product of resistance and compliance) to expire 96% of the inspired tidal volume. Therefore any longer expiratory time minimizes or fully avoids incomplete emptying. For instance, a resistance of  $10 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O.l}^{-1}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  and a compliance of  $100 \text{ ml.cmH}_2\text{O}^{-1}$  ( $0.1 \text{ l.cm H}_2\text{O}^{-1}$ ) results in a time constant of 1 s. Thus 3 s represents the minimal expiratory time needed to avoid intrinsic or auto-PEEP. Unfortunately, the diseased lungs are not only frequently inhomogeneous, making this calculation overly simplistic, but the presence of small airway collapse during expiration, also referred to as expiratory flow limitation, makes this even more complicated. Because of an abnormal structure of the small airways, when the pressure surrounding these conducts becomes higher than the pressure inside the airway, these small conducts collapse. The relationship between the “driving pressure” (pres-

sure in the alveoli minus pressure at the airway opening) on which is based the equation, disappears. In the setting of expiratory flow-limitation, the expiratory time required to minimize intrinsic PEEP is much longer than predicted by the time constant alone. By minimizing inspired minute ventilation the clinician can minimize intrinsic (auto-) PEEP.

### Can intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP be reliably measured?

Since the reason for the presence of intrinsic PEEP is flow-dependent pressure gradients from the alveolus to the airway opening, occluding of the expiratory port of the ventilator at the exact end of expiration causes airway pressure to equilibrate rapidly with alveolar pressure and reliably measure the end-expiratory alveolar pressure. This occlusion takes place at the exact time where the next inspiration should start and is now available on most modern ventilators (“expiratory hold or pause”). If the patient is fully relaxed, this pressure measurement reflects the mean alveolar pressure at the end of expiration. Most of the time a plateau is reached after less than 1 s, but in the case of inhomogeneous lungs this pressure may require a few seconds to also reflect some very slow compartments. This airway occlusion pressure may not be homogeneously present in the whole lung but represents an average pressure of all regional levels of end-expiration alveolar pressure. Usually the difference between the expiratory pause airway pressure and the set external PEEP is called intrinsic or auto-PEEP, while the measured pressure is referred to as total PEEP.

### Can the set external PEEP influence the total PEEP in the case of dynamic hyperinflation?

A frequent confusion is the belief that external PEEP could be useful in reducing the level of dynamic hyperinflation because it helps to reduce the value of auto- or intrinsic PEEP. Obviously this is not the case. The effect of external PEEP is to minimize the difference between the alveolar and the ventilator proximal airway pressure. This difference being called intrinsic or auto-PEEP, external PEEP application results in a decreased intrinsic or auto-PEEP. The level of dynamic hyperinflation, however, depends on the level of total PEEP and is either not influenced by external PEEP when external PEEP is less than intrinsic PEEP or is even worsened if external PEEP is set higher than the minimal level of regional intrinsic PEEP.

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Laurent Brochard

## **Intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure during spontaneous or assisted ventilation**

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### **To what extent does intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure influence work of breathing?**

For air to enter the lungs, the pressure inside the chest has to be lower than the pressure at the mouth (spontaneous breathing) or at the airway opening (assisted ventilation). In the case of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP, by definition, the end-expiratory alveolar pressure is higher than the pressure at the airway opening. When the patient initiates the breath, there is an inevitable need to reduce airway pressure to zero (spontaneous breathing) or to the value of end-expiratory pressure set on the ventilator (assisted ventilation) before any gas can flow into the lungs. For this reason, intrinsic or (auto-) PEEP has been described as an inspiratory threshold load. In patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) this load has sometimes been measured to be the major cause of increased work of breathing [3].

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### **During assisted ventilation, is the trigger sensitivity important to reduce intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure?**

Because the problem of intrinsic or (auto-) PEEP has to do with the onset of inspiration, one may reason that increasing the inspiratory trigger sensitivity to initiate a breath with a lower pressure or flow deflection should reduce the work of breathing induced by hyperinflation. These systems are based on the detection of a small pressure drop relative to baseline (pressure-triggering system) or on the presence of a small inspiratory flow (flow-triggering systems). Unfortunately, increasing the trigger sensitivity induces only a small reduction in the total work of breathing. The reason for this lack of effect relates to the need for the inspiratory trigger to sense changes in airway pressure or in inspiratory flow. Thus, intrinsic PEEP needs to be counterbalanced first by the

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### **Introduction**

The mechanisms generating intrinsic or auto-positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) during controlled mechanical ventilation in a relaxed patient also occur during spontaneous breathing or when the patient triggers the ventilator during an assisted mode [1, 2]. These include an increased time constant for passive exhalation of the respiratory system, a short expiratory time resulting from a relatively high respiratory rate and/or the presence of expiratory flow limitation. Whereas dynamic hyperinflation and intrinsic or auto-PEEP may have haemodynamic consequences, this is not frequently a major concern in spontaneously breathing patients or during assisted ventilation because the spontaneous inspiratory efforts result in a less positive or more negative mean intrathoracic pressure than during controlled mechanical ventilation. The main consequence of dynamic hyperinflation during spontaneous and assisted ventilation is the patient's increased effort to breathe and work of breathing [1, 2].

effort of the inspiratory muscles, in order for this effort to generate a small pressure drop (in the presence of a closed circuit) or to initiate the inspiratory flow (in an open circuit) [4]. The consequence of intrinsic or (auto-) PEEP is that the inspiratory effort starts during expiration. This is easily identified by inspection of the expiratory flow-time curve [1]. As a consequence, it cannot be detected by any of the commercially available trigger systems.

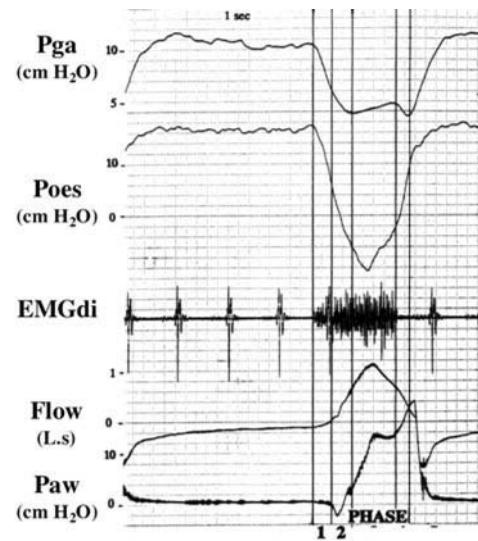
### **Can the set external positive end-expiratory pressure reduce dynamic hyperinflation and work of breathing?**

Responses to these two questions are the same as during controlled mechanical ventilation in a relaxed patient [1]. Their consequences are, however, very different. External PEEP reduces the difference between the alveolar and the ventilator proximal airway pressure, i.e., intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP. The inspiratory threshold load resulting from intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP is thus reduced by addition of external PEEP. Thus, the total work of breathing is reduced, especially in patients with high levels of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP, such as those subjects with COPD [5, 6].

Although external PEEP reduces work of breathing, it does not minimise hyperinflation. The level of dynamic hyperinflation is not modified by external PEEP, unless this PEEP is set higher than the minimal level of regional intrinsic PEEP, and then hyperinflation increases. Increasing hyperinflation can aggravate the working conditions of the respiratory muscles by placing them at a mechanical disadvantage and can result in significant haemodynamic compromise by decreasing venous return and increasing right ventricular outflow resistance. Hyperinflation in excess of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP occurs usually when the set PEEP is positioned at values above 80% of the mean "static" intrinsic PEEP [7]. For this reason, titration of external PEEP based on measuring intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP would be desirable. Unfortunately, a reliable measurement of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP in the spontaneously breathing subject is much more difficult to obtain than in passive positive-pressure ventilation conditions.

### **Can standard ventilatory settings influence intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure?**

During assisted ventilation, the patient is supposed to determine the respiratory rate freely, and one may suppose that he/she will govern his/her respiratory rate to control expiratory time and minimise hyperinflation. Unfortunately, most patients will not be able to counteract fully the effects of a ventilator inspiratory time longer than



**Fig. 1** Tracings of gastric ( $P_{ga}$ ), oesophageal ( $P_{oes}$ ) and airway ( $P_{aw}$ ) pressures, flow and diaphragmatic electromyographic activity ( $EMG_{di}$ ) during an assisted breath (pressure-support ventilation). The vertical lines help to delineate the different phases of the inspiratory effort. During phase 1, the flow is still expiratory: the start of  $EMG_{di}$  and the abrupt decrease in both  $P_{es}$  and  $P_{ga}$  all indicate that the patient performs an active inspiratory effort against intrinsic positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) at the same time that his/her expiratory muscles relax. Phase 2 is the triggering of the ventilator and occurs once intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP has been counterbalanced

their own inspiratory time [8]. Although some compensatory mechanism may exist, it will frequently be insufficient. Every setting influencing the ventilator inspiratory time may thus influence the level of dynamic hyperinflation.

### **Is intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure always synonymous with dynamic hyperinflation?**

In patients with spontaneous respiratory activity, recruitment of the expiratory muscles frequently participates in generating intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP independently of dynamic hyperinflation. In the case of airflow obstruction, the main consequence of an activation of the expiratory muscles is to augment intrathoracic pressure, whereas their effects on expiratory flow may be very modest, especially in the case of airflow limitation, thus promoting small airways to collapse. The activation of the expiratory muscles results from an increase in respiratory drive. Many patients with COPD already have a recruitment of their expiratory muscles at rest. This expiratory muscle recruitment results in a measurable increase in alveolar pressure. However, such expiratory muscle recruitment, although creating an intrinsic (or au-

to-) PEEP, does not contribute to the inspiratory threshold load and the increased work of breathing. Indeed, at the same time that the inspiratory muscles start to decrease intrathoracic pressure, the expiratory muscles relax and their release almost immediately abolishes this part of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP due to the expiratory muscles [9]. This is illustrated in Fig. 1.

### **Can intrinsic (or auto-) positive end-expiratory pressure be reliably measured?**

The commonly applied end-expiratory airway occlusion method that measures intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP in patients on controlled ventilation cannot be readily applied to the patient making spontaneous inspiratory efforts. For example, it is not possible to determine which amount of measured positive airway occlusion pressure, if not all, is due to expiratory muscle activity [9]. Setting the external PEEP based on this measurement could induce considerable mistakes by overestimating intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP. The only readily available and reliable method of measuring intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP in the spontaneously breathing subject is to measure the drop in oesophageal pressure occurring before flow becomes inspiratory, and sub-

sequently subtract the part due to expiratory muscle activity determined from an abdominal pressure signal [9]. The reasoning is as follows: any rise in abdominal pressure occurring during expiration is transmitted to the intrathoracic space and increases alveolar pressure.

Intrinsic PEEP is measured from the abrupt drop observed on the oesophageal pressure signal until flow becomes inspiratory (phase 1 on Fig. 1). Part of this drop in oesophageal pressure is caused by the relaxation of the expiratory muscles. This part needs to be subtracted from the oesophageal pressure drop, in order to evaluate a "corrected" intrinsic PEEP due to hyperinflation. Two main possibilities exist: to subtract the rise in gastric pressure that occurred during the preceding expiration [9] or to subtract the concomitant decrease in gastric pressure at the onset of the effort [10]. Because the correction of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP for expiratory muscle activity has not been used in early studies, one can hypothesise that the magnitude of intrinsic (or auto-) PEEP has often been overestimated. This combined oesophageal and gastric pressure measuring technique requires the insertion of a nasogastric tube equipped with both oesophageal and gastric balloon catheters. This technique is often used for research purposes but cannot be easily used at the bedside for routine clinical monitoring.

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# Work of breathing

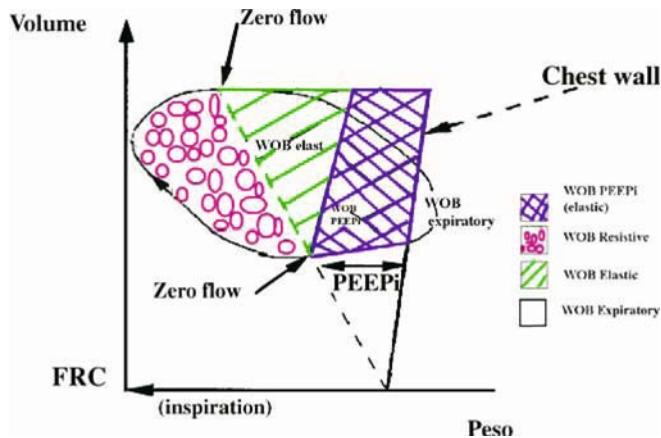
## Introduction

The main goal of mechanical ventilation is to help restore gas exchange and reduce the work of breathing (WOB) by assisting respiratory muscle activity. Knowing the determinants of WOB is essential for the effective use of mechanical ventilation and also to assess patient readiness for weaning. The active contraction of the respiratory muscles causes the thoracic compartment to expand, inducing pleural pressure to decrease. This negative pressure generated by the respiratory pump normally produces lung expansion and a decrease in alveolar pressure, causing air to flow into the lung. This driving pressure can be generated in three ways: entirely by the ventilator, as positive airway pressure during passive inflation and controlled mechanical ventilation; entirely by the patient's respiratory muscles during spontaneous unassisted breathing; or as a combination of the two, as in assisted mechanical ventilation. For positive-pressure ventilation to reduce WOB, there needs to be synchronous and smooth interaction between the ventilator and the respiratory muscles [1, 2, 3]. This note will concentrate on how to calculate the part of WOB generated by the patient's respiratory muscles, especially during assisted ventilation.

## Esophageal pressure and the Campbell diagram

Measuring WOB is a useful approach to calculate the total expenditure of energy developed by the respiratory

muscles [4]. In general, the work performed during each respiratory cycle is mathematically expressed as  $WOB = \int Pressure \times Volume$ , i.e. the area on a pressure-volume diagram. Esophageal pressure, which is easily measured, is usually taken as a surrogate for intrathoracic (pleural) pressure. The dynamic relation between pleural pressure and lung volume during breathing is referred to as the Campbell diagram [5] (Fig. 1). Esophageal pressure swings during inspiration are needed to overcome two forces: the elastic forces of the lung parenchyma and chest wall, and the resistive forces generated by the movement of gas through the airways. One can calculate these two components (elastic and resistive) by comparing the difference between esophageal pressure during the patient's effort during the breath and the pressure value in passive conditions, represented by the static volume-pressure curve of the relaxed chest wall. This passive volume-pressure curve is a crucial component of the Campbell diagram. It is calculated from the values of esophageal pressure obtained over lung volume when the airways are closed and the muscles are completely relaxed. Unfortunately, as this is difficult to do (because it requires passive inflation and often muscle paralysis), a theoretical value for the slope of this curve is frequently used. However, if a patient is passively ventilated and an esophageal balloon is placed, a true value for the volume-pressure relationship of the chest wall during passive tidal breathing can be obtained [6]. This passive pressure-volume relationship can be used as a reference value for subsequent calculations when the patient develops spontaneous inspiratory efforts.



**Fig. 1** Campbell's diagram. Work of breathing measured by the esophageal pressure: resistive WOB ( $W_{\text{resist}}$ ), elastic WOB ( $W_{\text{elast}}$ ), WOB related to active expiration (WOB expiratory) and WOB related to intrinsic PEEPi (W<sub>PEEPI</sub>). Chest wall: this thick line (the chest wall compliance) represents the pleural (esophageal) pressure obtained when muscles are totally relaxed and lung volume increases above functional residual capacity, measured in static conditions

The WOB is normally expressed in joules. One joule is the energy needed to move 1 l of gas through a 10-cmH<sub>2</sub>O pressure gradient. The work per liter of ventilation (J/l) is the work per cycle divided by the tidal volume (expressed in liters). In a healthy subject the normal value is around 0.35 J/l [7]. Lastly, WOB can be expressed in work per unit of time, multiplying joules per cycle by the respiratory rate (expressed in breaths per minute) to obtain the power of breathing (joules/minute). In a healthy subject the normal value is around 2.4 J/min [7]. As illustrated by the Campbell diagram, two other phenomena affect the WOB: intrinsic PEEP (positive end-expiratory pressure, or PEEPi) and active expiration.

### PEEPI and active expiration

The distending pressure of the lungs is called the transpulmonary pressure and it can be estimated as the difference between airway and esophageal (pleural) pressure. At the end of a normal expiration, alveolar and airway pressures are zero relative to atmosphere, and esophageal pressure is negative, reflecting the resting transpulmonary pressure (around 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O in normal conditions). However, in the presence of PEEPi, the alveolar pressure remains positive throughout expiration, because of either dynamic airway collapse or inadequate time to exhale [8]. This implies that some degree of dynamic hyperinflation does exist (lung volume at end-expiration is higher than passive functional residual capacity). Importantly, for lung volume to further increase in a patient with PEEPi, the inspiratory muscles contract to an amount equal to PEEPi before any volume is displaced.

PEEPI can be quite high in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and may represent a high proportion of the total WOB [9]. For example, a patient who displaces 0.5 l of tidal volume through a 7-cmH<sub>2</sub>O pressure gradient will perform an amount of work of 0.35 J/cycle. If nothing else changes except that this patient develops 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O of PEEPi, 0.25 J will be required to counterbalance this, meaning that the total WOB will be 0.60 J (0.35 + 0.25), which represents around 40% of the total work required for the inspiration. The PEEPi value is measured as the drop in esophageal pressure occurring during expiration when the inspiratory muscles start contraction, until the flow reaches the point of zero (see Fig. 1).

In the case of ineffective respiratory efforts, that is, muscle contraction without volume displacement, WOB cannot be measured from the Campbell diagram, since this calculation is based on volume displacement. In this situation, measurement of the pressure–time product (PTP) may more accurately reflect the energy expenditure of these muscles. The PTP is the product of the pressure developed by the respiratory muscles multiplied by the time of muscle contraction, expressed in cmH<sub>2</sub>O per second. The relevant pressure is again the difference between the measured esophageal pressure and the static relaxation curve of the chest wall.

Expiration normally occurs passively. However, the co-existence of PEEPi and active expiration is common, especially in COPD patients [10]. Positive expiratory swings in gastric pressure are observed during active expiration as a consequence of abdominal muscle recruitment. When the patient starts contracting the inspiratory muscles, the expiratory muscles also start to relax. The drop in esophageal pressure used to estimate PEEPi is therefore also due to the relaxation of the expiratory muscles. To avoid overestimating the value of PEEPi, the abdominal pressure swing resulting from the active expiration must thus be subtracted from the initial drop in esophageal pressure [10].

### Technical aspects of WOB calculation

Two other calculations can be obtained from pressure and volume measurements: airway pressure WOB and transpulmonary pressure WOB. The airway pressure WOB displays the energy dissipated by the ventilator to inflate the respiratory system. The transpulmonary pressure WOB shows the energy needed to inflate the lung parenchyma and reflects the mechanical characteristics of the pulmonary tissue. The limitation of these two measurements is that the amount of WOB performed by the patient's respiratory muscles is ignored.

The main tools used to measure the WOB are a double-lumen polyethylene gastro-esophageal catheter-balloon system and a pneumotachograph. The catheter has an esophageal and a gastric balloon, usually filled with

0.5 and 1 ml of air to measure the esophageal and gastric pressures, respectively. Correct positioning of the esophageal balloon is assessed by an occlusion test: when the airways are closed at the end of expiration and an active inspiration occurs, a drop in esophageal pressure occurs. In this scenario, there are no changes in lung volume and the decrease in esophageal pressure equals the decrease in airway pressure (because in the absence of volume displacement, the transpulmonary pressure has to be nil) [11]. The catheter-balloon system should be placed to obtain a ratio between airway pressure and esophageal pressure changes as close as possible to 1. Also, the correct positioning of the gastric balloon needs to be checked [12].

## Limitations

The calculation of WOB has several limitations. The first is that it requires insertion of a double-balloon gastro-esophageal catheter system. The second is the validity of the esophageal pressure value. Since pleural pressure is influenced by gravity, it can be modified by the weight of the thoracic content and by the posture. In the supine position, end-expiratory esophageal pressure is usually positive because of the weight of the heart and mediastinum on the esophagus. However, the amplitude of the changes in esophageal pressure is not usually affected. The third limitation is that the theoretical value for chest wall compliance is often used rather than a true measured

value. Furthermore, chest wall deformation can occur if levels of ventilation are high [13]. Lastly, it is difficult to determine what the optimal WOB level should be for each patient on clinical grounds.

## Conclusion

From the standpoint of clinical research, the measurement of WOB is extremely useful in the field of mechanical ventilation, having contributed to important progress in the management of patients for optimizing and understanding the effects of ventilator settings such as trigger, external PEEP, peak inspiratory flow, etc. WOB has also been used to evaluate the physiological effects of a number of agents such as helium and bronchodilators [9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19]. Studies on WOB have given us greater insight into the pathophysiology of weaning failure [3] and have also contributed to the progress made in the field of non-invasive mechanical ventilation [20, 21]. Bedside measurements of WOB in clinical practice, however, should be reserved for individuals in whom assessment of this parameter can provide further insight into the patient ability to breath and the patient-ventilator interactions.

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**Abstract** Most mechanical ventilators display tracings of airway pressure ( $P_{aw}$ ) volume ( $V$ ) and flow ( $V$ ). In volume preset modes,  $P_{aw}$  informs about the mechanical properties of the respiratory system and about the activity of respiratory muscles acting on the system. When monitoring ventilator waveforms, it

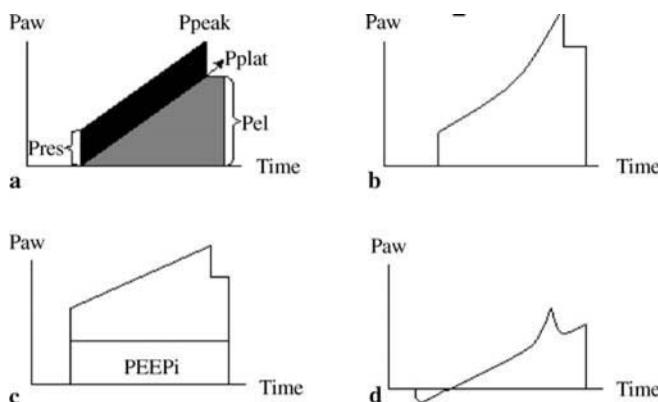
is important to appropriately scale the tracing so that nuances in time profiles may be appreciated. In this short monograph, we offer three examples of how clinicians may use this information for patient assessment and care.

### The Paw waveform

The interactions between a ventilator and a relaxed intubated patient can be modeled as a piston connected to a tube (flow-resistive element) and balloon (elastic element). Accordingly, at any instant in time ( $t$ ), the pressure at the tube inlet reflects the sum of a resistive pressure ( $Pres$ ) and an elastic pressure ( $Pel$ ) [1].  $Pres$  is determined by the product of tube resistance with  $V$ , while  $Pel$  is determined by the product of balloon elastance (a measure of balloon stiffness) with volume [1]. In this model, the resistive element reflects the properties of the intubated airways, while the elastic element reflects those of lungs and chest wall. When applied to volume preset ventilation with constant inspiratory  $V$  and a short post-inflation pause, the resulting  $P_{aw}$  tracing has three distinct components: (1) an initial step change proportional to  $Pres$ ; (2) a ramp that reflects the increase in  $Pel$  as the lungs fill to their end-inflation volume; and (3) a sudden decay from a pressure maximum ( $Ppeak$ ) to a plateau ( $Pplat$ ) that reflects the elastic recoil ( $Pel$ ) of the relaxed respiratory system at the volume at end-inflation. Since in this example flow is held constant throughout inflation,

$Pres$  must remain constant unless flow resistance changes volume and time. Consequently, the initial step change in  $P_{aw}$  and its decay from  $Ppeak$  to  $Pplat$  are of similar magnitude. Fig. 1a demonstrates these features. Since, in pneumatic systems, there are invariable delays in the pressure and flow transients, in practice the step changes in pressure are never as sudden as they are depicted in Fig. 1a [2]. Nevertheless, the amplitude of transients can be easily estimated by extrapolating the tracing relative to the slope of the pressure ramp. Finally, while the principles that govern the interactions between pressure, volume and flow apply to all modes of mechanical ventilation, the specific pressure waveforms depicted in Fig. 1 refer only to constant flow inflation (square wave) and look very different when other flow profiles (e.g., decelerating, sine wave) are used. Our use of square wave profiles in Fig. 1 should not be interpreted as an endorsement of a specific mode, but rather as the most convenient means to present this information.

The tracing in Fig. 1b differs in several important respects: the  $P_{aw}$  ramp is steeper and it is nonlinear with respect to time. Since  $V$  is constant the nonlinearity between  $P_{aw}$  and  $t$  means that the relationship between  $P_{aw}$  and  $V$



**Fig. 1** Schematic illustration of the Paw profile with time during constant-flow, volume-cycle ventilation. **a** Passive respiratory system with normal elastance and resistance. Work to overcome the resistive forces is represented by the *black shaded area*, and the *gray shaded area* represents the work to overcome the elastic forces. **b** Up-sloping of the Paw tracing representing increased respiratory system elastance. **c** Paw tracing in the presence of inadvertent PEEP. **d** scalloping of the Paw tracing generated by a large patient effort (Paw airway pressure, Pel elastic pressure, Ppeak pressure maximum, Pplat pressure plateau, PPEPi inadvertent PEEP, Pres resistive pressure)

must be nonlinear as well. Assuming identical ventilator settings as in Fig. 1a the increased steepness of the ramp and its convexity to the time axis indicates a stiffening of the respiratory system with volume and time and suggests that the lungs may be overinflated to volumes near or ex-

ceeding their capacity. At the bedside, such an observation should raise concern for injurious ventilator settings [2].

The tracing in Fig. 1c is characterized by a larger-than-expected initial step change in Paw that exceeds the peak-to-plateau pressure difference. In an otherwise relaxed patient, such an observation should raise suspicion for dynamic hyperinflation and inadvertent PEEP (PEEP*i*). If Pel at end-expiration is greater than Paw at that time (i.e., PEEPi is present), then gas will flow in the expiratory direction. The step change in Paw during the subsequent inflation will therefore not only reflect Pres but also PEEPi that must be overcome to reverse flow at the tube entrance [1]. Tracings like the one in Fig. 1c should therefore alert the clinician to the presence of dynamic hyperinflation and provide an estimate of the extrinsic PEEP necessary to minimize the associated work of breathing. PEEPi is invariably associated with a sudden transient in expiratory flow prior to ventilator-assisted lung inflation [3]. However, this flow transient need not be associated with dynamic hyperinflation, because it is also seen in patients with increased respiratory effort and active expiration.

The tracing in Fig. 1d represents a significant departure from relaxation patterns. There is no initial step change in Paw; the ramp is nonlinear, and the end-inspiratory pressure plateau is lower than expected. This tracing suggests that the inspiratory muscles are active throughout machine inflation and that their work represents a considerable fraction of the work performed on the respiratory system. This pattern should alert clinicians to the presence of a potentially fatiguing load.

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## Dead space

alveolar Vd ( $Vd_{alv}$ ). Mechanical ventilation, if present, adds additional Vd as part of the ventilator equipment (endotracheal tubes, humidification devices, and connectors). This instrumental dead space is considered to be part of the  $Vd_{aw}$ . Physiologic dead space ( $Vd_{phys}$ ) is comprised of  $Vd_{aw}$  (instrumental and anatomic dead space) and  $Vd_{alv}$  and it is usually reported in mechanical ventilation as the portion of tidal volume (Vt) or minute ventilation that does not participate in gas exchange [1, 2].

A device that measures partial pressures ( $PCO_2$ ) or fractions ( $FCO_2$ ) of  $CO_2$  during the breathing cycle is called a capnograph. The equation to transform  $FCO_2$  into  $PCO_2$  is  $PCO_2 = FCO_2$  multiplied by the difference between barometric pressure minus water-vapour pressure. Time-based capnography expresses the  $CO_2$  signal as a function of time and from this plot mean expiratory (Douglas bag method) or end-expiratory (end-tidal)  $CO_2$  values can be obtained. The integration of the volume signal using an accurate flow sensor (pneumotachograph) and  $CO_2$  signal (with a very fast  $CO_2$  sensor) is known as volumetric capnography. Combined with the measurement of arterial  $PCO_2$  ( $PaCO_2$ ) it provides a precise quantification of the ratio of  $Vd_{phys}$  to Vt. The three phases of a volumetric capnogram are shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. The combination of airflow and mainstream capnography monitoring allows calculation of breath by breath  $CO_2$  production and pulmonary dead space. Therefore, the use of volumetric capnography is clinically more profitable than time-based capnography.

### Introduction

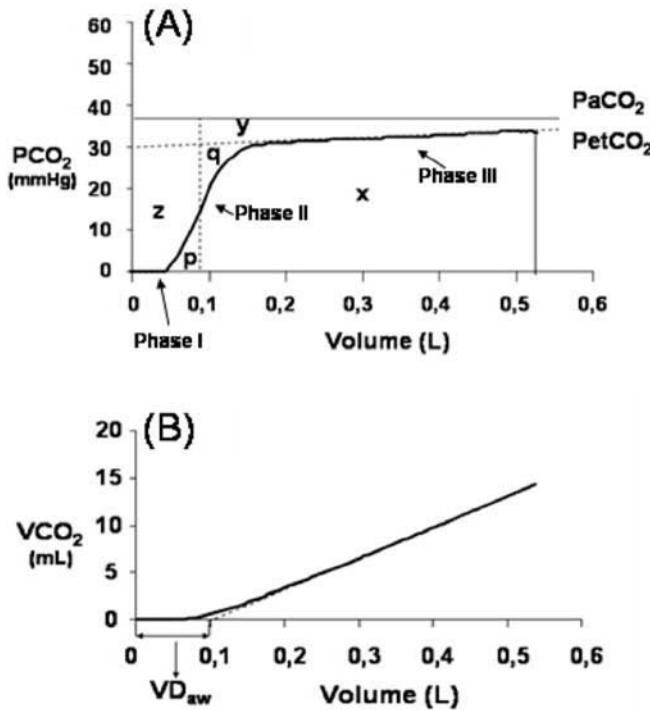
Dead space is that part of the tidal volume that does not participate in gas exchange. Although the concept of pulmonary dead space was introduced more than a hundred years ago, current knowledge and technical advances have only recently lead to the adoption of dead space measurement as a potentially useful bedside clinical tool.

### Concept of dead space

The homogeneity between ventilation and perfusion determines normal gas exchange. The concept of dead space accounts for those lung areas that are ventilated but not perfused. The volume of dead space (Vd) reflects the sum of two separate components of lung volume: 1) the nose, pharynx, and conduction airways do not contribute to gas exchange and are often referred to as anatomical Vd or herein as airway Vd ( $Vd_{aw}$ ); 2) well-ventilated alveoli but receiving minimal blood flow comprise the

### Measurement of dead space using $CO_2$ as a tracer gas

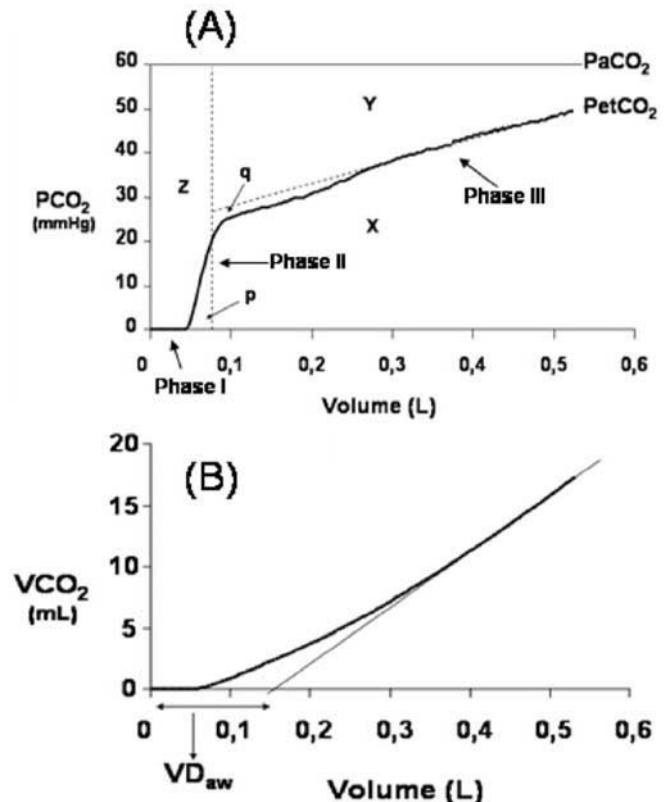
Bohr originally defined  $Vd/Vt$  [2] as:  $Vd/Vt = (F_A CO_2 - F_E CO_2)/F_A CO_2$ , where  $F_A CO_2$  and  $F_E CO_2$  are fractions of  $CO_2$  in alveolar gas and in mixed expired gas, respectively. End-tidal  $CO_2$  is used to approximate  $F_A CO_2$ ,



**Fig. 1** **A** Single-breath expiratory volumetric capnogram recorded in a healthy patient receiving controlled mechanical ventilation. Dead-space components are shown graphically and equations are depicted and explained in the text. Phase I is the CO<sub>2</sub> free volume which corresponds to Vd<sub>aw</sub>. Phase II represents the transition between airway and progressive emptying of alveoli. Phase III represents alveolar gas. PaCO<sub>2</sub> is arterial PCO<sub>2</sub>; PetCO<sub>2</sub> is end-tidal PCO<sub>2</sub>. Drawings adapted from [2]; **B** Single-breath expiratory carbon dioxide volume (VCO<sub>2</sub>) plotted as a function of exhaled tidal volume. The alternative method to measure airway dead space (Vd<sub>aw</sub>) described by Langley et al. [3] is graphically shown in a healthy patient receiving controlled mechanical ventilation

assuming end-tidal and alveolar CO<sub>2</sub> fractions are identical. Physiologic dead space calculated from the Enghoff modification of the Bohr equation uses PaCO<sub>2</sub> with the assumption that PaCO<sub>2</sub> is similar to alveolar PCO<sub>2</sub> [2], such that:  $Vd_{phys}/Vt = (PaCO_2 - P_{E}CO_2)/PaCO_2$ , where P<sub>E</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> is the partial pressure of CO<sub>2</sub> in mixed expired gas and is equal to the mean expired CO<sub>2</sub> fraction multiplied by the difference between the atmospheric pressure and the water-vapour pressure. Since  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  measures the fraction of each tidal breath that is wasted on both Vd<sub>alv</sub> and Vd<sub>aw</sub>, the Vd<sub>aw</sub> must be subtracted from  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  to obtain the Vd<sub>alv</sub>/Vt. Vd<sub>phys</sub>/Vt is the most commonly and commercially (volumetric capnographs) formula used to estimate pulmonary dead space at the bedside.

Additional methods mostly used in research to calculate all the Vd components are shown in Fig. 1A and Fig. 2A. Fowler [1] introduced a procedure for measuring Vd<sub>aw</sub> based on the geometric method of equivalent areas (p = q), obtained by crossing the back extrapolation of phase III of the expired CO<sub>2</sub> concentration over time with



**Fig. 2** **A** Single-breath expiratory volumetric capnogram recorded in a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patient receiving controlled mechanical ventilation. The three phases of the volumetric capnogram are depicted. The transition from phase II to III is less evident due to heterogeneity of ventilation and perfusion ratios. Dead-space components are shown graphically and equations are depicted and explained in the text. PaCO<sub>2</sub> is arterial PCO<sub>2</sub>; PetCO<sub>2</sub> is end-tidal PCO<sub>2</sub>. Drawings adapted from [2]; **B** Single-breath expiratory carbon dioxide volume (VCO<sub>2</sub>) plotted as a function of exhaled tidal volume. The alternative method to measure airway dead space (Vd<sub>aw</sub>) described by Langley et al. [3] is graphically shown in a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patient receiving controlled mechanical ventilation

a vertical line traced so as to have equal p and q areas. Airway dead space is then measured from the beginning of expiration to the point where the vertical line crosses the volume axis [1]. By tracing a line parallel to the volume axis and equal to the PaCO<sub>2</sub>, it is possible to determine the readings from areas y and z, which respectively represent the values of alveolar and airway dead space. Referring these values to the Vt, it is possible to single out several Vd components [2]:

$$Vd_{phys}/Vt = (Y + Z)/(X + Y + Z)$$

$$Vd_{alv}/Vt = Y/(X + Y + Z)$$

$$Vd_{aw}/Vt = Z/(X + Y + Z)$$

An alternative method to measure airway dead space introduced by Langley et al. [3] is based on determination of the  $\text{VCO}_2$  value, which corresponds to the area inscribed within the  $\text{CO}_2$  versus volume curve (indicated in Fig. 1A and Fig. 2A as X area). Figure 1B and Fig. 2B are examples of  $Vd_{aw}$  calculation using the Langley et al. [3] method. Briefly,  $\text{VCO}_2$  is plotted versus expired breath volume. Thereafter,  $Vd_{aw}$  can be calculated from the value obtained on the volume axis by back extrapolation from the first linear part of the  $\text{VCO}_2$  versus volume curve.

Although these indexes are clinically useful, they are always bound to visual criteria for the definition of phase III of the expired capnogram. Often, the geometric analysis establishing the separation between the phase II and phase III is hardly seen and the rate of  $\text{CO}_2$  raising of the phase III is nonlinear in patients with lung inhomogeneities (Fig. 2A).

### **Utility of dead space in different clinical scenarios**

The  $\text{CO}_2$  tension difference between pulmonary capillary blood and alveolar gas is usually small in normal subjects and end-tidal  $\text{PCO}_2$  is close to alveolar and arterial  $\text{PCO}_2$ . Physiologic dead space is the primary determinant of the difference between arterial and end-tidal  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $\Delta\text{PCO}_2$ ) in patients with a normal cardio-respiratory system. Patients with cardiopulmonary diseases have altered ventilation to perfusion ( $V_A/Q_T$ ) ratios producing abnormalities of  $Vd$ , as well as in intrapulmonary shunt, and the latter may also affect the  $\Delta\text{PCO}_2$ . A  $\Delta\text{PCO}_2$  beyond 5 mmHg is attributed to abnormalities in  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  and/or by an increase in venous admixture (the fraction of the cardiac output that passes through the lungs without taking oxygen) or both. The increase in  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  seen in normal patients when anaesthetised may be attributed to muscle paralysis, which causes a reduction of functional residual capacity and alters the normal distribution of ventilation and perfusion across the lung [2, 4, 5, 6].

Ventilation to regions having little or no blood flow (low alveolar  $\text{PCO}_2$ ) affects pulmonary dead space. In patients with airflow obstruction, inhomogeneities in ventilation are responsible for the increase in  $Vd$ . Shunt increase  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  as the mixed venous  $\text{PCO}_2$  from shunted blood elevates the  $\text{PaCO}_2$ , increasing  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  by the fraction that  $\text{PaCO}_2$  exceeds the nonshunted pulmonary capillary  $\text{PCO}_2$  [7].  $Vd_{alv}$  is increased by shock states, systemic and pulmonary hypotension, obstruction of pulmonary vessels (massive pulmonary embolus and microthrombosis), even in the absence of a subsequent decrease in ventilation and low cardiac output.  $Vd_{aw}$  is increased by lung overdistension and additional ventilatory apparatus dead space. Endotracheal tubes, heat and moisture exchangers, and other common connectors

may increase ventilator dead space and induce hypercapnia during low  $Vt$  or low minute ventilation.  $Vd_{aw}$  calculations include the ventilator dead space. Because the anatomic dead space remains relatively constant as  $Vt$  is reduced, very low  $Vt$  is associated with a high  $Vd/Vt$  ratio [1, 2, 7, 8, 9].

Positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) is used to increase lung volume and to improve oxygenation in patients with acute lung injury.  $Vd_{alv}$  is large in acute lung injury and does not vary systematically with PEEP. However, when the effect of PEEP is to recruit collapsed lung units resulting in an improvement of oxygenation,  $Vd_{alv}$  may decrease, and alveolar recruitment is associated with decreased arterial minus end-tidal  $\text{CO}_2$  difference [4, 5, 6]. Conversely, PEEP-induced overdistension may increase  $Vd_{alv}$  and widen this difference [7].

In patients with sudden pulmonary vascular occlusion due to pulmonary embolism, the resultant high  $V_A/Q_T$  mismatch produces an increase in  $Vd_{alv}$ . The association of a normal D-dimer assay result plus a normal  $Vd_{alv}$  is a highly sensitive screening test to rule out the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism [9].

### **Dead space and outcome prediction**

Characteristic features of acute lung injury are alveolar and capillary endothelial cell injuries that result in alterations of pulmonary microcirculation. Consequently, adequate pulmonary ventilation and blood flow across the lungs are compromised and  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  increases. A high dead-space fraction represents an impaired ability to excrete  $\text{CO}_2$  due to any kind of  $V_A/Q_T$  mismatch [7]. Nuckton et al. [10] demonstrated that a high  $Vd_{phys}/Vt$  was independently associated with an increased risk of death in patients diagnosed with acute respiratory distress syndrome.

### **Conclusions**

The advanced technology combination of airway flow monitoring and mainstream capnography allows breath-by-breath bedside calculation of pulmonary  $Vd$  and  $\text{CO}_2$  elimination. For these reasons, the use of volumetric capnography is clinically more useful than time capnography. Measurement of dead-space fraction early in the course of acute respiratory failure may provide clinicians with important physiologic and prognostic information. Further studies are warranted to assess whether the continuous measurement of different derived capnographic indices is useful for risk identification and stratification, and to track the effect of a therapeutic intervention during the course of disease in critically ill patients.

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Enrico Calzia  
Peter Radermacher

## Alveolar ventilation and pulmonary blood flow: the $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$ concept

Given a stable cardiac output (CO) and inspiratory oxygen concentration ( $F_{IO_2}$ ), any gas exchange abnormality leading to hypoxia or hypercapnia may be explained solely on the basis of an altered distribution of the ventilation and perfusion ( $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$ ) regardless of the underlying disease [1].

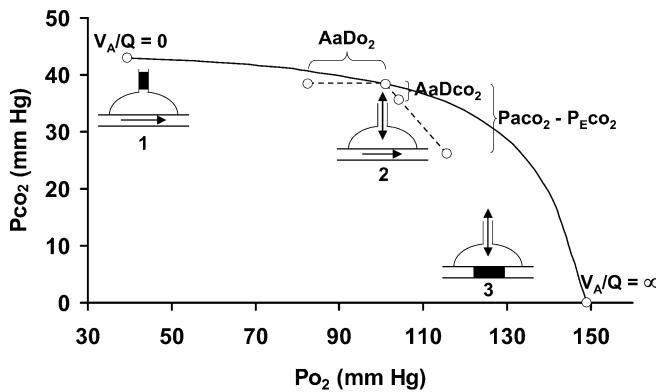
### 1. The alveolus is the functional unit of the lung

The alveolus and the surrounding capillaries represent the functional lung gas exchange unit. Diffusive gas transport across the alveolar–capillary membrane is very rapid [2]. Even under pathologic conditions gas exchange at the alveolar level is *not* limited by diffusion across the gas–blood barrier, but mainly by the interplay between gas transport to (and from) the alveolar space (ventilation,  $\dot{V}_A$ ) and blood flow across the alveolar capillaries (perfusion,  $\dot{Q}$ ). End-capillary gas partial pressures exactly reflect alveolar gas composition. Therefore, since arterial blood is the sum of the blood from each alveolar

region and the blood that bypasses the alveolar compartments (i.e., shunt), the gas composition in each alveolus will determine the arterial blood gas values in direct dependence on both ventilation and perfusion. In lung regions where ventilation exceeds perfusion, the alveolar gas partial pressures will approach the inspired ones. In contrast, if perfusion exceeds ventilation, the alveolar gas composition will more closely resemble the composition of mixed venous blood. Consequently, at a  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratio near unity,  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$  gas exchange is optimally balanced. Since alveoli with such an optimal  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratio are the main contributors to the achievement of “normal” arterial blood gas values they are called “ideal” alveoli. At  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratios exceeding the ideal value the gas composition of each alveolus will approach that of inspired gas, at lower  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratios that of mixed venous blood. In reality, the  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratio is slightly less than unity, because the respiratory quotient, which is the ratio of  $O_2$  absorbed to  $CO_2$  excreted, is usually less than unity.

### 2. Graphic analysis of pulmonary gas exchange: the $Po_2$ - $Pco_2$ diagram

The effects of a ventilation–perfusion mismatch on gas exchange are graphically described by the  $Po_2$ – $Pco_2$  diagram first introduced by Rahn and Farhi (Fig. 1) [3]. Since the  $Po_2$  and  $Pco_2$  in each alveolus is determined by the  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  ratio, a line through all  $Po_2$ – $Pco_2$  value pairs can be drawn connecting two endpoints of mixed venous blood and inspired gas composition. Each point on this line represents  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  values from 0 (representing perfused but not ventilated alveoli, thus corresponding to shunt areas) to  $\infty$  (representing ventilated but not perfused alveoli, thus corresponding to dead space). Theoretically, the most efficient gas exchange should be expected in a perfectly homogeneous lung, with an overall  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  value near unity. However, even in healthy subjects a limitation in gas exchange is imposed by the inhomogeneity of the lung.



**Fig. 1** The  $P_o_2$ - $P_{CO_2}$  diagram of Rahn and Farhi graphically explains the theoretical concepts of ventilation/perfusion distribution and pulmonary gas exchange. (From [13], with permission)

geneous distribution of the  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  values, mainly as a result of gravitational forces. In normal physiologic states, however, this inhomogeneity is fairly moderate, but it substantially increases with disease.

### 3. $\dot{V}_A/Q$ mismatch is quantified by the three-compartment model of ideal alveoli, shunt, and dead space

Assuming a perfectly homogeneous  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  distribution and no shunt, alveolar (=end capillary) and arterial gas partial pressures should be equal. Consequently, any alveolar-to-arterial  $P_o_2$  or  $P_{CO_2}$  differences reflect inhomogeneous  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  distribution and are used to quantify the  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  mismatch. Conceptually, as suggested by Riley and Cournand [4], alveolar gas exchange can be simplified to occurring within three types of alveoli: those with matched  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  (ideal), those with no  $Q$  (dead space), and those with no  $\dot{V}_A$  (shunt). This “three-compartment” simplification is attractive because it allows one to quantify gas exchange abnormalities by the proportion of gas exchange units in each compartment.

Although “ideal” alveolar zones contribute to minimizing alveolar-to-arterial differences, blood from shunt perfusion zones joins blood coming from alveolar regions with gas values identical to mixed venous ones, thus increasing both alveolar-to-arterial  $O_2$  differences and arterial  $CO_2$  levels. An unappreciated result of increased shunt fraction is the increase in arterial  $P_{CO_2}$  as mixed venous  $CO_2$  passes the alveoli and mixes with the arterial blood. Based on these considerations, the amount of right-to-left shunt can be derived from the calculated gas content in capillary, arterial, and mixed venous blood using the equation

$$Q_s/Q_t = (CcO_2 - CaO_2)/(CcO_2 - CvO_2) \quad (1)$$

where  $Q_s/Q_t$ =shunt fraction or venous admixture,  $Cao_2$ =arterial blood  $O_2$  content,  $Cco_2$ =end-capillary  $O_2$  content, and  $Cvo_2$ =mixed venous  $O_2$  content.

Since capillary  $O_2$  content cannot be measured directly, it is assumed to equal ideal alveolar  $O_2$  content ( $C_{Al}O_2$ ), which is estimated by the ideal alveolar  $O_2$  partial pressure ( $P_{Al}O_2$ ) obtained by the simplified alveolar gas equation

$$P_{Al}O_2 = P_iO_2 - (PaCO_2/RQ) \quad (2)$$

where  $P_{Al}O_2$ =“ideal” alveolar  $O_2$  partial pressure,  $P_iO_2$ =inspired  $O_2$  partial pressure,  $PaCO_2$ =arterial blood  $CO_2$  partial pressure, and  $RQ$ =respiratory quotient.

The accuracy of these formulas is limited by mainly three factors. First, the calculation of  $Cco_2$  from  $P_{Al}O_2$  assumes equilibration of alveolar and end-capillary gas and ignores the impact that changes in pH and  $PCO_2$  may have on gas exchange. Second, although  $Paco_2$  is presumed to equal  $P_{Al}CO_2$ , this assumption is incorrect when shunt causes  $Pco_2$  to increase more than  $P_{Al}CO_2$ . And finally, the respiratory exchange ratio (RQ) is assumed to be 0.8, but may actually vary between 1.0 and 0.7 based on metabolic activity and diet. Despite these limitations, however, these formulae are remarkably accurate, allowing the estimation of right-to-left shunt in the clinical setting.

In contrast to shunts, gas exchange abnormalities due to increased dead space ventilation result in partial exclusion of inspired gas from gas exchange. Thus, expired gas partial pressures are maintained closer to the inspired ones. Commonly, the dead space fraction is calculated by the Bohr equation

$$V_D/V_T = (PaCO_2 - PeCO_2)/PaCO_2 \quad (3)$$

where  $V_D/V_T$ =dead space fraction,  $PaCO_2$ =arterial blood  $CO_2$  partial pressure, and  $PeCO_2$ =mid-expired  $CO_2$  partial pressure.

Although this three-compartment model is useful in calculating shunt and dead space, clearly, gas exchange units can have local ventilation to perfusion ratios anywhere from 0 to  $\infty$ , and not just 0, 1, and  $\infty$ . However, the three-compartment model forces parts of the lung to be in one of these three compartments. Under normal resting conditions, this assumption is not so far off of reality, because most alveolar regions are characterized by  $\dot{V}_A/Q$ -values between 1 and 0.8, or very near 0 and  $\infty$  respectively. Experimentally, one may measure the exact  $\dot{V}_A/Q$  distribution of the entire lung using the multiple inert gas technique. However, the utility of this approach to bedside assessment of gas exchange abnormalities is low because of its impracticality.

#### 4. Hypoxia and hypercapnia are caused by severe $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$ mismatching

Both oxygenation and CO<sub>2</sub> homeostasis may be considerably impaired by  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  mismatch, although usually only hypoxia is referred to as the result of increased venous admixture, while hypercapnia is generally considered the result of increased dead space ventilation or hypoventilation. However, if minute ventilation is fixed, as is the case during controlled ventilation, then increasing shunt fraction will cause hypercarbia. In the awake, spontaneously breathing subject, CO<sub>2</sub> elimination may be sufficiently maintained through chemoreceptor feedback even in the presence of low  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  alveoli, so that arterial CO<sub>2</sub> remains normal. In contrast, due to the narrow limits imposed by hemoglobin O<sub>2</sub> saturation, blood O<sub>2</sub> content cannot be increased by hyperventilation, and is therefore more susceptible to be decreased by increasing venous admixture. Obviously, however, substantial hypercapnia will also result from hugely increased venous admixture exceeding the limits of compensation, especially if venous admixture is almost completely caused by true shunt (e.g., atelectatic regions).

#### 5. Clinical implications

Beneficial effects of different recommended recruitment and ventilation strategies for patients receiving mechanical ventilation are generally explained by their impact of ventilation to perfusion matching [5], even though the precise interplay between lung mechanics, hemodynamics, and  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  distribution is complex. Preventing alveolar collapse by the use of continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) and positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) minimizes shunt, as do recruitment maneuvers, whereas vasodilator therapy, including aerosolized bronchodilator therapy, by increasing blood flow to potentially underventilated lung units increases shunt and arterial desaturation. This is the cause of hypoxemia following bronchodilator therapy in severe asthmatics. Pressure-limited ventilation and smaller tidal volume ventilation

with attention paid to avoiding dynamic hyperinflation minimize dead space [6]. Prone positioning of the patient and interspacing spontaneous ventilatory efforts by causing diaphragmatic contraction improve  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  matching.

When one takes into account the effects of systemic blood flow on gas exchange, the interactions become more complex again. The interactions between intra- and extra-pulmonary factors, such as changes in cardiac output, systemic oxygen uptake, and mixed venous O<sub>2</sub> saturation, can directly alter arterial oxygenation and CO<sub>2</sub> content independent of changes in  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$ . For example, although intravenous vasodilators usually increase intrapulmonary shunt in patients with adult respiratory distress syndrome or cardiogenic pulmonary edema, the associated increase in cardiac output, especially in the heart failure group, may offset the increased shunt by increasing mixed venous O<sub>2</sub> saturation [7]. Thus, the resultant change in arterial oxygenation cannot be predicted ahead of time [8]. Furthermore, some intravenous vasodilators may affect CO<sub>2</sub> elimination through several mechanisms. They may impair CO<sub>2</sub> elimination by increasing shunt fraction or increasing blood flow and CO<sub>2</sub> delivery to the lungs; also, if cardiac output does not increase in response of the intravenous administration of vasodilators, the intrathoracic blood volume may decrease, thus increasing the amount of hypoperfused areas especially in apical lung zones [9]. Giving vasodilators by inhalation should minimize shunt because only ventilated lung units will receive the vasodilating agent. Thus, inhalational vasodilating therapy should improve  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  matching. This has been shown to occur in patients with gas exchange abnormalities when treated with nitric oxide (NO) inhalation or aerosolized prostacyclin [10, 11]. The underlying pathology seems to be crucially important in regard to the effects on arterial oxygenation. While patients with adult respiratory distress syndrome or right heart failure improve their gas exchange, inhaled vasodilators may worsen arterial oxygenation by inhibiting hypoxic vasoconstriction in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, since  $\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}$  mismatch in hypoventilated areas rather than true shunt is the predominant cause of arterial hypoxemia in such cases [12].

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### Introduction

A fundamental aspect of cardiopulmonary homeostasis is the adequate delivery of oxygen to meet the metabolic demands of the body. Cardiac output, O<sub>2</sub>-carrying capacity (i.e., hemoglobin concentration and quality), and arterial PO<sub>2</sub> (PaO<sub>2</sub>) determine O<sub>2</sub> transport. Relevant to this discussion, arterial hypoxemia commonly occurs in patients with acute respiratory failure (ARF). If arterial hypoxemia is severe enough, it is not compatible with life. The two primary causes of ARF are acute lung injury (ALI)/acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD). Although the treatment for arterial hypoxemia always includes increases in the fractional inspired O<sub>2</sub> concentration (FIO<sub>2</sub>), the degree to which patients' PaO<sub>2</sub> improves and the need for adjuvant therapies differ markedly between these two groups of disease processes. The mechanisms by which arterial hypoxemia occurs in ALI/ARDS and COPD have been characterized using the multiple inert gas elimination technique (MIGET) approach [1]. MIGET provides

precise estimates of the distributions of alveolar ventilation and pulmonary perfusion (V<sub>A</sub>/Q) and their relationships, there is no need to change the FIO<sub>2</sub> during measurements, hence avoiding variations in the pulmonary vascular tone, and it facilitates the unraveling of the active interplay between intrapulmonary, namely V<sub>A</sub>/Q imbalance, intrapulmonary shunt and limitation of alveolar to end-capillary O<sub>2</sub> diffusion, and extrapulmonary (i.e., FIO<sub>2</sub>, total ventilation, cardiac output and oxygen consumption) factors governing hypoxemia [2].

The cardinal gas exchange features under which the lung operates that uniquely determine the PO<sub>2</sub> and PCO<sub>2</sub> in each gas exchange unit of the lung are the V<sub>A</sub>/Q ratio, the composition of the inspired gas, and the mixed venous blood gas composition [3]. Each of these three factors may play key role influencing oxygenation. For example, the major mechanism of arterial hypoxemia in ALI/ARDS is intrapulmonary shunt (zero V<sub>A</sub>/Q ratios) induced by the presence of collapsed or flooded alveolar units, whereas in COPD the primary mechanism of hypoxemia is V<sub>A</sub>/Q mismatching.

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### Effect of breathing oxygen on oxygenation

In ALI/ARDS, as FIO<sub>2</sub> increases, PaO<sub>2</sub> increases as long as the amount of shunt is limited. The greater the degree of shunt, the less PaO<sub>2</sub> increases. In contrast, in COPD, in which the prime mechanism of hypoxemia is V<sub>A</sub>/Q mismatching, the response to high FIO<sub>2</sub> levels is broadly similar irrespective of disease severity. With moderate V<sub>A</sub>/Q imbalance PaO<sub>2</sub> increases almost linearly as FIO<sub>2</sub> is increased. In severely acute COPD the degree of very low V<sub>A</sub>/Q ratios resembles shunt; the increase in PaO<sub>2</sub> in response to increasing FIO<sub>2</sub> is only slightly limited, becoming less responsive to increases FIO<sub>2</sub>.

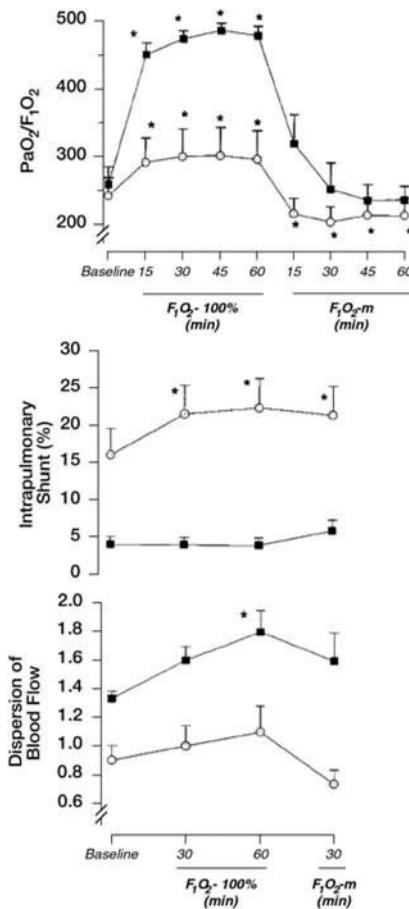
Importantly, FIO<sub>2</sub> can also alter V<sub>A</sub>/Q balance through two additional mechanisms: hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction (HPV) and reabsorption atelectasis (RA).

One of the main means by which the normal lung adjusts to low regional  $V_A$  is to induce vasoconstriction of the associated pulmonary vasculature to redirect perfusion away from nonventilated or under ventilated alveolar units. Thus HPV minimizes  $V_A/Q$  inequality, limiting the decrease in  $\text{PaO}_2$  that would have occurred if such redistribution of blood flow had not occurred. One of the best  $V_A/Q$  indicators of the presence of HPV, as measured by MIGET, is the behavior of the area with normal and low  $V_A/Q$  ratios, reflected in the dispersion of pulmonary blood flow. In sequential measures one sees a significant increase in the latter  $V_A/Q$  descriptor while breathing 100%  $O_2$ . By contrast, shunt and the dispersion of alveolar ventilation that incorporates areas with normal and high  $V_A/Q$  ratios remain unchanged during HPV release.

Breathing 100%  $O_2$  ( $\text{FIO}_2=1.0$ ) can induce intrapulmonary shunt because lung units with low inspired  $V_A/Q$  ratios, termed "critical"  $V_A/Q$  ratios, can result in absent expired ventilation because all the inflated gas is absorbed. This results in alveolar denitrogenation, allowing complete gas resorption with atelectasis (RA) to develop spontaneously [4]. These critical  $V_A/Q$  units are dependent on the  $\text{FIO}_2$ , increasing both their potential area of collapse and rate of collapse considerably as  $\text{FIO}_2$  approaches 1.0. Alternatively, these critical units may remain open despite increasing  $\text{FIO}_2$  levels if functional residual capacity and tidal volume are increased, owing to alveolar interdependence. This is the rationale for using positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) and larger tidal volumes in patients with ALI/ARDS to prevent RA.

Both RA and HPV can be observed, respectively, in the responses of patients with ALI/ARDS and COPD needing mechanical support who are given an  $\text{FIO}_2$  of 1.0 [5] (Fig. 1). Intrapulmonary shunt increases moderately then remains stable for at least 30 min in ALI/ARDS patients given an  $\text{FIO}_2$  of 1.0. In contrast, in COPD patients the dispersion of pulmonary blood flow, one of the most common  $V_A/Q$  indicators in COPD, further increases to an  $\text{FIO}_2$  of 1.0 while the modest levels of intrapulmonary shunt remain unchanged, a response that strongly suggests HPV release. Both responses to pure  $O_2$  breathing are accompanied with increases in  $\text{PaO}_2$ , which are much more prominent in patients with COPD.

The increase in intrapulmonary shunt in ALI/ARDS is likely due to RA. If cardiac output increases as part of the sympathetic response to arterial hypoxemia, one may also see a parallel increase in mixed venous  $\text{PO}_2$  owing to increased  $O_2$  delivery. This can offset the increased shunt fraction minimizing the decrease in  $\text{PaO}_2$ . The deleterious effects of RA on pulmonary gas exchange may be enhanced by the mechanical trigger imposed on peripheral airways by ventilator support. Indeed, the repeated opening and closing of distal airways and/or the overexpansion of closed alveolar units with abnormally high shear stresses may result in more inflammatory lung changes, aggravating the initial mechanical stress injury.



**Fig. 1** Index of oxygenation ( $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FIO}_2$ ), intrapulmonary shunt (expressed as percentage of cardiac output), and dispersion of pulmonary blood flow (log SDQ, dimensionless) while breathing 100%  $O_2$ . In ALI/ARDS (open circles) both  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FIO}_2$  and log SDQ remain essentially unchanged while shunt increases significantly, indicating RA; note that after reinstatement of maintenance  $\text{FIO}_2$  shunt still remains increased. In COPD exacerbation (closed squares)  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FIO}_2$  and log SDQ substantially increase while the very modest shunt unvaried, indicating HPV release (by permission from [5])

On the other hand, the changes observed in COPD during hyperoxia suggest that inhibition of HPV is the primary process. Interestingly, gas exchange abnormalities in both entities take place in the absence of measurable changes in pulmonary hemodynamics, suggesting that regional blood flow redistribution can have relevant effects on gas exchange despite minimal changes in pulmonary arterial pressure and blood flow.

If  $V_A$  were to decrease or dead space to increase, arterial  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $\text{PaCO}_2$ ) would increase. Hyperoxia-induced increases in  $\text{PaCO}_2$  in response to  $\text{FIO}_2$  1.0 breathing are more notable in ALI/ARDS than in COPD and can be attributed almost completely to the parallel increases in dead space, with a marginal role of the Haldane effect (i.e., decreasing  $\text{PaO}_2$  increases  $\text{PaCO}_2$  off-loading from

hemoglobin). Conceivably, the increased dead space indicates redistribution of pulmonary blood flow from high  $V_A/Q$  areas either to regions with no ventilated (shunt) alveolar units in ALI/ARDS or to those poorly ventilated with low  $V_A/Q$  areas in COPD. This process, however, has not been definitely characterized. An alternative and/or complementary mechanism in ALI/ARDS for the observed increase in  $\text{PaCO}_2$  could be overexpansion of remaining normal lung zones provoked by RA, but in COPD by bronchodilation secondary to the hypercapnia.

### **Protective ventilator support**

Protective ventilator support with low tidal volume and high PEEP levels has become the preferred approach to decrease the impact of ventilator-associated lung injury [6]. This protective support causes a substantial improvement in gas exchange by increasing  $\text{PaO}_2$  and decreasing intrapulmonary shunt. However, this strategy of increased PEEP and small tidal volumes is often accompanied by hypercapnia. Hypercapnia induces both vasodilatation and increased cardiac output, both of which increase intrapulmonary shunt and potentially impair arterial oxygenation. The principal factor to explain the observed reduction in shunt in protective lung ventilation is the recruitment of previously collapsed alveoli, as shown by the close correlation between the decreased intrapulmonary shunt and the amount of PEEP-induced lung volume recruitment. Furthermore, the parallel increase in cardiac output caused by the hypercapnia-induced vasodilatation does not induce any proportional

injurious increases in intrapulmonary shunt. Conceivably, the alveolar recruitment induced by recruitment efficiently redistributes pulmonary blood flow to regions with alveolar units with normal  $V_A/Q$  balance. A parallel finding in protective lung ventilation is the significant increase in physiological dead space, possibly related to the combined effects of a decreased alveolar ventilation and increased functional residual capacity. Thus the application of a protective ventilator support combining low tidal volumes and high PEEP levels represent a beneficial ventilator strategy in ALI/ARDS both in terms of minimizing lung stress and augmenting gas exchange.

### **Summary**

The primary mechanisms leading to arterial hypoxemia in ARF secondary to COPD exacerbations and ALI/ARDS are  $V_A/Q$  imbalance and intrapulmonary shunt while the conditions that uniquely determine the  $\text{PO}_2$  and  $\text{PCO}_2$  in gas exchange units of the lung are the  $V_A/Q$  ratio and the composition of inspired gas and mixed venous blood. This is why the extrapulmonary factors governing hypoxemia, i.e.,  $\text{FIO}_2$ , total ventilation, cardiac output, and  $\text{O}_2$  consumption, always need to be considered. The increase in intrapulmonary shunt characteristically shown in ALI/ARDS patients breathing high  $\text{FIO}_2$  levels is secondary to the development of RA, whereas in COPD patients it is usually due to withdrawal of HPV, reflected by further  $V_A/Q$  worsening only without parallel increases in intrapulmonary shunt.

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## Introduction

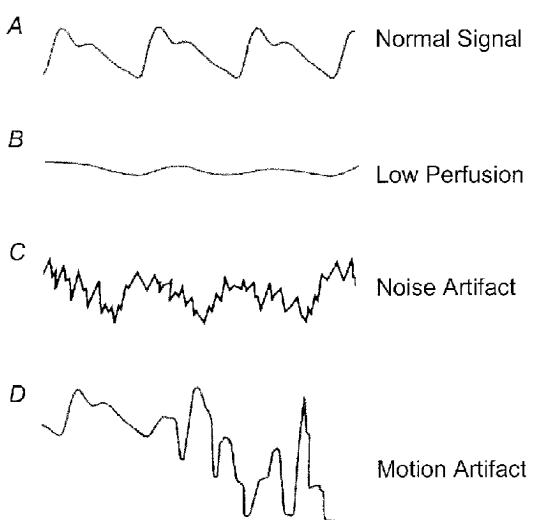
Continuous monitoring of arterial blood saturation using pulse oximetry has become the standard of care in the ICU. With the proliferation of pulse oximeters, episodic hypoxemia is detected much more commonly than previously suspected. By alerting the clinician to the presence of hypoxemia, pulse oximeters can lead to a more rapid treatment of serious hypoxemia and possibly avoid serious complication. Moreover, pulse oximetry can reduce arterial blood gas analysis and potentially decrease health care costs [1].

## Principles of pulse oximetry

Pulse oximeters determine oxygen ( $O_2$ ) saturation by measuring light absorption of arterial blood at two specific wavelengths, 660 nm (red) and 940 nm (infrared) [2]. The ratio of absorbencies at the wavelengths is then calibrated empirically against direct measurements of arterial blood oxygen saturation ( $SaO_2$ ), and the resulting calibration curve is used to generate the pulse oximeter's estimate of arterial saturation ( $SpO_2$ ). In addition to the digital read-out of  $O_2$  saturation, most pulse oximeters display a plethysmographic waveform, which can help

clinicians distinguish an artifactual signal from the true signal (Fig. 1).

The accuracy of commercially available oximeters in critically ill patients has been validated in several studies [3]. Compared with the measurement standard (multi-wavelength CO oximeter), pulse oximeters have a mean difference (bias) of less than 1% and a standard deviation (precision) of less than 2% when  $SaO_2$  is 90% or above [4]. While pulse oximetry is accurate in reflecting one-point measurements of  $SaO_2$ , it does not reliably predict changes in  $SaO_2$  [4]. Moreover, the accuracy of pulse oximeters deteriorates when  $SaO_2$  falls to 80% or less. In critically ill patients, poor agreement between the oximeter and a CO oximeter has been observed, with bias the



**Fig. 1** Common pulsatile signals on a pulse oximeter. *Top panel* Normal signal showing the sharp waveform with a clear dicrotic notch. *Second panel* Pulsatile signal during low perfusion showing a typical sine wave. *Third panel* Pulsatile signal with superimposed noise artifact giving a jagged appearance. *Lowest panel* Pulsatile signal during motion artifact showing an erratic waveform. (From [1])

ranging from -12% to 18%, and oximetry tends systematically to underestimate  $\text{SaO}_2$  when it is 80% or less.

## **Limitations of pulse oximetry**

Oximeters have a number of limitations which may lead to inaccurate readings [1]; these are presented below.

### **Physiological limitations**

#### *Oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve*

Pulse oximeters measure  $\text{SaO}_2$ , which is physiologically related to arterial oxygen tension ( $\text{PaO}_2$ ) according to the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve. Because the dissociation curve has a sigmoid shape, oximetry is relatively insensitive in detecting the development of hypoxemia in patients with high baseline levels of  $\text{PaO}_2$ .

#### *Limitation in the signal processing*

#### *Ambient light*

Although pulse oximeters correct for ambient light, falsely low  $\text{SpO}_2$  readings have been reported with fluorescent and xenon arc surgical lamps. Wrapping the probe with an opaque shield can minimize this effect.

#### *Low perfusion*

Pulse oximetry depends on satisfactory arterial perfusion of the skin, and thus low cardiac output, vasoconstriction, or hypothermia can make it difficult for a sensor to distinguish the true signal from background noise. In cardiac surgery patients experiencing hypothermia and poor perfusion, only 2 of 20 oximeters (Criticare CSI 503, Datex Satlite) provide measurements within  $\pm 4\%$  of the CO oximeter value.

#### *Motion artifact*

The occurrence of motion artifacts continues to be a significant source of error and false alarms. In 235 surgical patients managed in the ICU, 67% of pulse oximeter alarms were false [5]. An innovative technological approach, termed Masimo signal extraction technology, was introduced to extract the true signal from artifact due to noise and low perfusion. When tested in 50 postoperative patients, the pulse oximeter's alarm frequency was decreased twofold with the new system vs. a conventional oximeter. When tested under conditions of low

perfusion and motion, the ability to track changes in  $\text{SpO}_2$  and reduce nuisance alarms was improved with this technology [3].

### **Interference from substances**

#### *Dyshemoglobins*

Pulse oximeters employ only two wavelengths of light and thus can distinguish only two substances, oxyhemoglobin and reduced hemoglobin. Accordingly, elevated carboxyhemoglobin and methemoglobin levels can cause inaccurate oximetry readings [1].

#### *Intravenous dyes*

Intravenous dyes such as methylene blue, indocyanine green, and indigo carmine can cause falsely low  $\text{SpO}_2$  readings, an effect that persists for up to 20 min.

#### *Skin pigmentation and other pigments*

Inaccurate oximetry readings have been observed in pigmented patients. In critically ill patients, a bias of more than 4% has been observed to occur more frequently in black (27%) than in white patients (11%). Nail polish, if blue, green, or black, causes inaccurate  $\text{SpO}_2$  readings; however, mounting the oximeter probe sideways alleviates the problem with nail polish. Acrylic nails do not interfere with readings.

### **Limited knowledge of technique**

Many users have only a limited understanding of pulse oximetry. One survey revealed that 30% of physicians and 93% of nurses thought that the oximeter measured  $\text{PaO}_2$ . A more recent audit demonstrated that less than 50% of nurses and physicians were able to identify that motion artifact, arrhythmias, and nail polish can affect the accuracy of pulse oximeter [6].

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## **Clinical applications**

### **Detection of hypoxemia**

With the introduction of pulse oximetry hypoxemia (defined as an  $\text{SpO}_2$  value less than 90%) is detected more often in critically ill patients. Moreover, myocardial ischemia (defined as angina or ST segment depression) in postoperative patients is less common in patients monitored with pulse oximetry than those without oximetry [7].

## Assessing pulmonary gas exchange

Pulse oximeters measure  $\text{SaO}_2$ , which is physiologically related to  $\text{PaO}_2$ . In critically ill patients receiving mechanical ventilation, changes in  $\text{SpO}_2$  may not accurately reflect changes in  $\text{PaO}_2$  and may in fact be in an opposite direction to the change in  $\text{PO}_2$ . Decisions in therapy made on the basis of  $\text{SpO}_2$  alone can also differ from those based on  $\text{PO}_2$ . Accordingly, caution is required when making decisions in critically ill patients based solely on pulse oximetry. While pulse oximetry is a suitable way of measuring arterial oxygenation, it does not assess ventilation. Indeed, measurements of  $\text{SpO}_2$  have been shown to be inaccurate in assessing abnormal pulmonary gas exchange, defined as an elevated alveolar-arterial  $\text{O}_2$  difference [1].

## Titration of fractional inspired oxygen concentration

Pulse oximetry can assist with titration of fractional inspired oxygen concentration ( $\text{FIO}_2$ ) in ventilator-dependent patients, although the appropriate  $\text{SpO}_2$  target depends on a patient's pigmentation. In white patients, an  $\text{SpO}_2$  target value of 92% predicts a satisfactory level of oxygenation, whereas black patients required an  $\text{SpO}_2$  target of 95%. In patients with severe acute respiratory distress syndrome, an  $\text{SpO}_2$  target of 88–90% is acceptable in order to minimize oxygen toxicity.

## Blood pressure measurements

In pulse oximeters that display a pulsatile waveform, systolic blood pressure can be measured by noting the reappearance of the pulsatile waveform during cuff deflation or the waveform disappearance during slow cuff inflation (Fig. 1). In healthy volunteers, good agreement (i.e., bias <1.0 mmHg) was obtained when the average of oximetry based-systolic pressure estimates at the disappearance and reappearance of the waveform were compared with Korotokoff sound pressures and noninvasive equipment blood pressures.

## Cardiopulmonary arrest

The usefulness of pulse oximetry as part of the first-line resuscitation equipment at the site of a cardiopulmonary arrest was assessed in 20 patients [8]. A signal in which the pulse rate on the oximeter was correlated with the electrocardiogram or chest compression rate was observed in the three patients who suffered only a respiratory arrest and in only 4 of 17 patients who suffered a cardiac arrest. The physicians judged the pulse oximeter

was to be of definite benefit in the management of 7 of 20 patients, 5 of whom survived.

## Screening test for cardiopulmonary disease

The potential usefulness of pulse oximetry as a screening tool for cardiopulmonary disease that could supplement or supplant respiratory rate as a "pulmonary vital sign" was investigated in patients managed in the emergency department [9]. An inverse but weak relationship (correlation coefficient -0.16) was observed between  $\text{SpO}_2$  and respiratory rate. Overall only one-third of patients with an  $\text{SpO}_2$  value below 90% would exhibit an increase in respiratory rate. While pulse oximetry could be used as a screening tool for cardiopulmonary disease, there are no data to suggest that decisions based on  $\text{SpO}_2$  improve outcome over decisions based on respiratory rate.

## Screening for respiratory failure in asthma

Pulse oximetry has been evaluated as a means of screening for respiratory failure in patients with severe asthma [10]. Respiratory failure occurred in only 4% of the patients with an  $\text{SaO}_2$  value higher than 92%. The investigators concluded that an  $\text{SpO}_2$  higher than 92% in this setting suggests that respiratory failure is unlikely and therefore arterial blood gas measurements are unnecessary. Interestingly, this threshold value of 92% is the same target value that predicted reliably a satisfactory level of oxygenation during titration of  $\text{FIO}_2$  in ventilator-dependent patients.

## Pulmonary embolus

In patients with documented pulmonary embolism the room air  $\text{SpO}_2$  level may be an important predictor of death; mortality was found in one study to be 2% in patients with pulse oximetry of 95% or higher vs. 20% with pulse oximetry less than 95% [11]. When the threshold value was prospectively evaluated in 119 patients, 10 of whom developed hospital complications,  $\text{SpO}_2$  less than 95% had a sensitivity of 90%, specificity of 64%, and overall diagnostic accuracy of 67%. Although the number of patients with complications were low, these data suggest that pulse oximetry may be useful in predicting outcome in patients with pulmonary embolus.

In summary, pulse oximetry is probably one of the most important advances in respiratory monitoring. The major challenge facing pulse oximetry is whether this technology can be incorporated effectively into diagnostic and management algorithms that improve the efficiency of clinical management in the ICU.

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**Abstract** *Background:* Changes in body temperature have important impact on measurements of blood gases. In blood gas analyzers the samples are always kept constant at a temperature of exactly 37°C during the measurements, and therefore results are not correct if body temperature differs from 37°C. *Objective:* Lack of knowledge of the effects of body temperature on results of blood gas monitoring may lead to wrong

and potentially harmful interpretations and decisions in the clinical setting. The following article elucidates alterations in monitoring of blood gases and oxyhemoglobin saturation ( $\text{SO}_2$ ) that occur during changes in body temperature.

**Keywords** Blood gas monitoring · Oxyhemoglobin saturation · Hypothermia · Hyperthermia

## Blood gas monitoring

Blood gases (oxygen and carbon dioxide) are usually reported as partial pressures (gas tensions) since according to Henry's law the partial pressure of a gas is proportional to its concentration at a given temperature and pressure. However, as temperature decreases, the solubility of oxygen and carbon dioxide in blood or any other fluid increases, which means that the relationship of partial pressure to the total content of oxygen or carbon dioxide in the fluid changes.

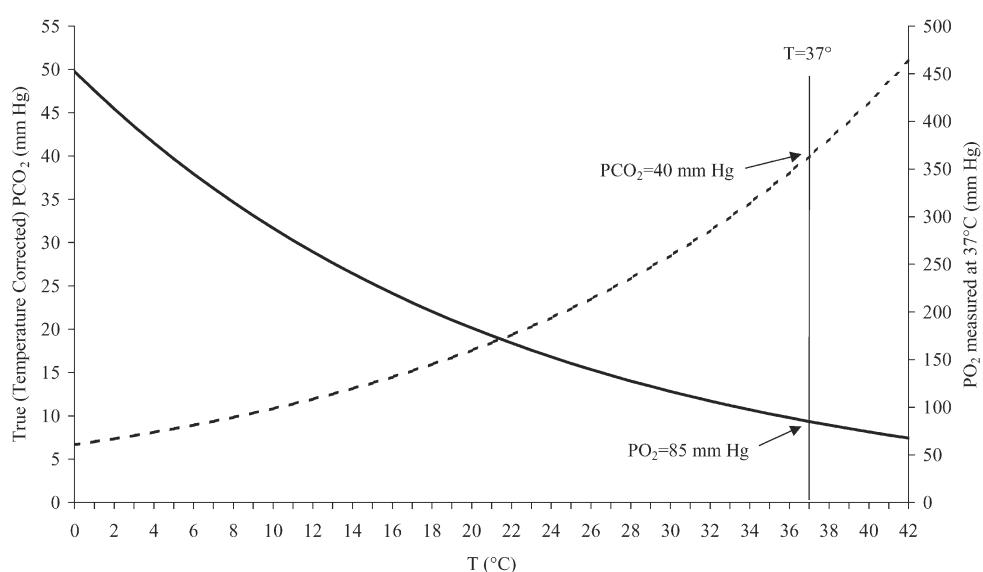
### Carbon dioxide

If blood containing a given amount of carbon dioxide at a certain tension ( $\text{PCO}_2$ ) at 37°C is cooled, with the possibility to equilibrate with air, the total content of  $\text{CO}_2$  in this blood sample remains constant, whereas  $\text{PCO}_2$  decreases due to the increased proportion of dissolved  $\text{CO}_2$  at lower temperature. Since the  $\text{PCO}_2$  of air or any inspired gas mixture is almost zero, no additional molecules of  $\text{CO}_2$  diffuse into the blood. If a blood sample is rewarmed to 37°C in a blood gas analyzer under vacuum-sealed conditions, the previously increased dissolved pro-

portion of  $\text{CO}_2$  again contributes to  $\text{PCO}_2$ . The measured  $\text{PCO}_2$  of this blood sample is the same as at 37°C.

Hypothermia reduces the metabolic rate and the rate of  $\text{CO}_2$  production. To hold the arterial  $\text{CO}_2$  content constant during cooling it is necessary to reduce  $\text{CO}_2$  elimination (i.e., by reducing minute ventilation in anesthetized patients) equivalently to the decrease in  $\text{CO}_2$  production. If this is performed, arterial carbon dioxide tension ( $\text{PaCO}_2$ ) measured in a blood gas analyzer at 37°C remains at the same level as during normothermia. Blood gas analyzers are usually equipped with algorithms that enable the true  $\text{PaCO}_2$  to be calculated at the actual body temperature (Fig. 1) [1]. True  $\text{PaCO}_2$  corrected for current body temperature is of course lower during hypothermia than the  $\text{PaCO}_2$  value measured at 37°C. The difference between these two values corresponds to the increase in  $\text{CO}_2$  solubility during cooling. The concept of  $\text{CO}_2$  management in which the  $\text{PCO}_2$  obtained by measurement at 37°C is kept constant at 40 mmHg regardless of current body temperature is called alpha-stat. If the  $\text{PCO}_2$  value corrected for current body temperature is held constant during cooling at the same level as during normothermia (37°C), the total amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  increases during hypothermia because of the constant  $\text{PaCO}_2$  and the increased proportion of  $\text{CO}_2$  that is soluble in blood. In this case

**Fig. 1** Dashed line True (temperature corrected)  $\text{PCO}_2$  during changes in body temperature.  $\text{PCO}_2$  measured at  $37^\circ\text{C}$  remains constant at 40 mmHg. Solid line  $\text{PO}_2$  measured at  $37^\circ\text{C}$  during changes in body temperature. True (temperature corrected)  $\text{PO}_2$  remains constant at 85 mmHg



$\text{CO}_2$  elimination is not only reduced by the amount of decreased  $\text{CO}_2$  production but additionally by the increased amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  dissolved in blood during hypothermia. The latter concept of  $\text{CO}_2$  management is called pH-stat.

## pH

pH varies with  $\text{CO}_2$  during variations in body temperature. If alpha-stat  $\text{CO}_2$  management is applied, pH that is not corrected for current body temperature remains constant. True pH increases since true  $\text{PaCO}_2$  has decreased during hypothermia. If pH-stat  $\text{CO}_2$  management is applied, both true  $\text{PaCO}_2$  and true pH remain constant during cooling, and pH that is not corrected for current body temperature decreases. The amount of true pH change resulting from a change in body temperature may be calculated as follows:  $\text{pH}_T = \text{pH}_{37} - [0.0146 + 0.0065 (\text{pH}_{37} - 7.4)](T - 37)$ , where  $\text{pH}_T$  is true pH at current body temperature,  $\text{pH}_{37}$  is pH at  $37^\circ\text{C}$ , and T is current body temperature ( $^\circ\text{C}$ ).

## Oxygen

The effects of temperature changes on oxygen tension ( $\text{PO}_2$ ) differ markedly from those on  $\text{PCO}_2$ . The principal effect that hypothermia leads to increased solubility of  $\text{O}_2$  in blood is the same as for  $\text{CO}_2$ . Therefore during hypothermia one could expect a lower  $\text{PO}_2$  for a given amount of oxygen. However, in contrast to  $\text{CO}_2$ , the oxygen content of room air or any inspired gas mixture and of alveolar gas is never zero. The  $\text{PO}_2$  of room air at standard atmospheric pressure (patm) of 760 mmHg is ap-

proximately 159 mmHg. If an increased amount of  $\text{O}_2$  molecules dissolve in blood during cooling,  $\text{PO}_2$  does not decrease as does  $\text{PCO}_2$  because  $\text{O}_2$  from the environment and from alveolar gas diffuse into blood, and the  $\text{PO}_2$  values equilibrate between these two compartments. The  $\text{O}_2$  content in blood thus thereby increases. This schematic model is in fact representative of that which occurs in the alveoli and capillaries of the lungs. If we take a blood sample at hypothermia and put it into a blood gas analyzer, this sample is rewarmed to  $37^\circ\text{C}$  under vacuum-sealed conditions. The previously increased proportion of dissolved  $\text{O}_2$  then contributes to  $\text{PO}_2$ , which thereby increases. Thus  $\text{PO}_2$  values that are not corrected for current body temperature are higher than during normothermia (Fig. 1) [1]. Temperature-corrected  $\text{PO}_2$  is equal to the values obtained during normothermia.

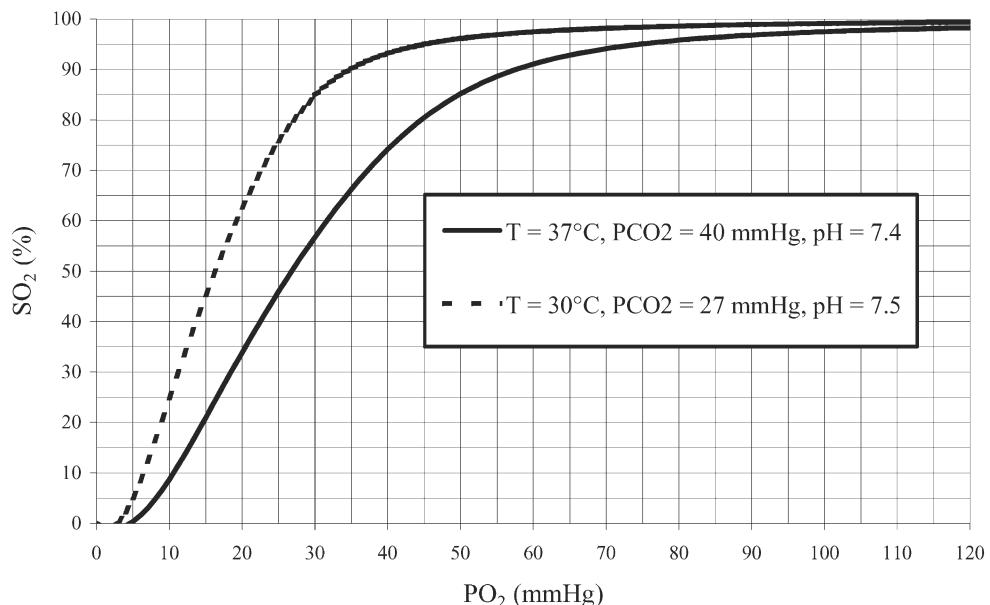
The clinical relevance of these effects is clear: Whenever we measure arterial oxygen tension ( $\text{PaO}_2$ ) and do not correct these values for current (hypothermic) body temperature, true  $\text{PaO}_2$  does not increase during cooling, but the observed increase in measured  $\text{PaO}_2$  is due only to the fact that body temperature and the temperature at which the sample is analyzed differ. Considering that the gradient between  $\text{PaO}_2$  and cellular (mitochondrial)  $\text{PO}_2$  is the driving force that maintains normal  $\text{O}_2$  extraction by the tissue, it would be a mistake to adapt inspired oxygen fraction ( $\text{FIO}_2$ ) to the uncorrected, apparently high values of  $\text{PaO}_2$  obtained during hypothermia. To maintain true  $\text{PaO}_2$  in the normal range the measured  $\text{PaO}_2$  should always be corrected for current body temperature in hypothermic patients.

Apart from the effects of increased  $\text{O}_2$  solubility there is another effect that slightly affects  $\text{PaO}_2$  during hypothermia. Since  $\text{PaO}_2$  is related to the alveolar oxygen tension ( $\text{PAO}_2$ ), true  $\text{PaO}_2$  might indeed increase a very

**Table 1** An example of changes in blood gases during alpha-stat and pH-stat regimens as body temperature (*BT*) decreases from 37°C to 30°C

	BT 37°C		BT 30°C	
Alpha-stat				
PCO <sub>2</sub> (mmHg)	40	After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	40	
pO <sub>2</sub> (mmHg)	85	True value (corrected): After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	29	
pH	7.40	True value (corrected): After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	117	
		True value (corrected)	85	
pH-stat		After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	7.40	
PCO <sub>2</sub> (mmHg)	40	True value (corrected)	56	
pO <sub>2</sub> (mmHg)	85	After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	117	
pH	7.40	True value (corrected): After rewarming to 37°C in blood gas analyzer	85	
		True value (corrected)	7.30	
			7.40	

### Oxyhemoglobin Dissociation Curves



**Fig. 2** Leftward shift of the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve caused by hypothermia. Temperature (*T*) is 30°C for the dotted curve. The true carbon dioxide tension (PCO<sub>2</sub>) of 27 mmHg and pH of 7.5 at 30°C correspond to a PCO<sub>2</sub> of 40 mmHg and pH of 7.4 at 37°C. Oxyhemoglobin saturation (SO<sub>2</sub>)=100(a<sub>1</sub>PO<sub>2</sub>+a<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>2</sub><sup>2</sup>+a<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>2</sub><sup>3</sup>+PO<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup>)/(a<sub>4</sub>+a<sub>5</sub>PO<sub>2</sub>+a<sub>6</sub>PO<sub>2</sub><sup>2</sup>+a<sub>7</sub>PO<sub>2</sub><sup>3</sup>+PO<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup>). The seven coefficients (a<sub>1</sub>-a<sub>7</sub>) were determined by a least-squares fitting of the equation to paired values of PO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> (a<sub>1</sub>=-8532.2289, a<sub>2</sub>=2121.4010, a<sub>3</sub>=-67.073989, a<sub>4</sub>=935960.87, a<sub>5</sub>=-31346.258, a<sub>6</sub>=

2396.1674, a<sub>7</sub>=-67.104406). Oxygen tension is measured at current conditions of pH, PCO<sub>2</sub>, and T. Then it must be converted into a PO<sub>2</sub> that would be obtained at a pH of 7.40, a PCO<sub>2</sub> of 40 mmHg, and T of 37°C. The equation to convert the actual PO<sub>2</sub> to this virtual PO<sub>2</sub> is: [PO<sub>2</sub> virtual]=[PO<sub>2</sub> actual]×10<sup>0.0024 (37-T)+0.40 (pH-7.40)+0.06[log<sub>10</sub>(40)-log<sub>10</sub>(PCO<sub>2</sub>)]</sup>. Then the equation for the standard oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve is again applied to predict actual SO<sub>2</sub>

small amount during moderate hypothermia if pulmonary gas exchange conditions and the gradient between PaO<sub>2</sub> and PAO<sub>2</sub> (aADO<sub>2</sub>) remain constant. PAO<sub>2</sub> depends on FIO<sub>2</sub>, patm, water vapor pressure (pH<sub>2</sub>O), PaCO<sub>2</sub>, and the respiratory quotient (RQ=CO<sub>2</sub> production rate/O<sub>2</sub> consumption rate). PAO<sub>2</sub>=FIO<sub>2</sub>(patm-pH<sub>2</sub>O)-PaCO<sub>2</sub>×RQ<sup>-1</sup>. Water vapor pressure decreases exponentially with a decrease in temperature. At 37°C pH<sub>2</sub>O is approx.

47 mmHg, at 30°C approx. 31 mmHg, and at 15°C approx. 12 mmHg. At FIO<sub>2</sub> of 0.21, patm of 760 mmHg, PaCO<sub>2</sub> of 40 mmHg, and RQ of 0.8, PAO<sub>2</sub> is 99.7 mmHg at 37°C, 103.1 mmHg at 30°C, and 107.1 mmHg at 15°C. Table 1 illustrates changes in blood gases during alpha-stat and pH-stat regimens as body temperature decreases from 37°C to 30°C.

## Effects of hypothermia on SO<sub>2</sub>

Arterial (SaO<sub>2</sub>), mixed venous (SvO<sub>2</sub>), and jugular bulb (SjvO<sub>2</sub>) oxyhemoglobin saturation are strongly affected by changes in body temperature. The curve of the relationship between SO<sub>2</sub> and PO<sub>2</sub>, i.e., the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve, is S-shaped. Hypothermia, a decrease in the intracellular concentration of 2,3-diphosphoglycerate in erythrocytes, a decrease in PCO<sub>2</sub>, and an increase in pH cause a leftward shift of the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve, which means that at a given PO<sub>2</sub> the SO<sub>2</sub> value is higher than under normal conditions. The corresponding SO<sub>2</sub> to a given PO<sub>2</sub> may be calculated with sufficient accuracy (Fig. 2) [2]. Due to the S-shape of the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve changes in SO<sub>2</sub> caused by a leftward shift are more pronounced when PO<sub>2</sub> is in the medium range. Therefore hypothermia leads to an increase in SvO<sub>2</sub> and SjvO<sub>2</sub> rather than SaO<sub>2</sub> because normal SaO<sub>2</sub> is already close to 100%. Hypothermia inhibits oxygen release from hemoglobin in the capillaries (i.e., oxygen extraction) without providing any benefits with regard to increasing SaO<sub>2</sub>. In other words, a much lower tissue PO<sub>2</sub> would be required to obtain the same degree of oxyhemoglobin desaturation in the capillary. The total amount of O<sub>2</sub> flow from the capillary to the cells and mitochondria would then decrease because the driving force of O<sub>2</sub> diffusion, i.e., the gradient between mitochondrial PO<sub>2</sub> and capillary or tissue PO<sub>2</sub> is reduced.

Oxygen consumption (VO<sub>2</sub>) decreases during hypothermia. The relationship between cerebral VO<sub>2</sub> and temperature has been well investigated [3, 4]. This is determined by the factor Q10: Q10=cerebral VO<sub>2</sub> at Tx/cerebral VO<sub>2</sub> at Ty, where Tx-Ty=10°C. Q10 is not constant over the entire temperature range that is clinically possible [3, 4]. In dogs Q10 is approx. 2.2 when T=37–27°C, approx. 4.5 when T=27–14°C, and approx. 2.2 when T=13–7°C [3, 4]. Cerebral VO<sub>2</sub> at a given temperature may be calculated as follows: VO<sub>2</sub> at Ty=VO<sub>2</sub> at Tx×Q10<sup>(Ty-Tx)/10</sup>

Because hypothermia leads to a leftward shift of the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve and to a decrease in VO<sub>2</sub>, SvO<sub>2</sub> should significantly increase during cooling, particularly if O<sub>2</sub> delivery remains unchanged. This has in fact been found in hypothermic (32°C) patients under endogenous circulation, i.e., without the use of extracorporeal circulation [5].

In conclusion, variations in body temperature significantly affect the results of important and frequently used monitoring techniques in intensive care, anesthesia, and emergency medicine. The knowledge of physical and technical changes during hypothermia or hyperthermia is necessary to avoid pitfalls in monitoring of blood gases, SO<sub>2</sub>, and etCO<sub>2</sub>. Ignoring these effects may lead to harmful and incorrect conclusions derived from our measurements in the clinical setting as well as for scientific purposes.

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## Venous oximetry

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### Physiology of mixed venous and central venous oxygen saturation

O<sub>2</sub> delivery (DO<sub>2</sub>) describes whole-body oxygen supply according to the following formula:

$$DO_2 = CO \times CaO_2 \quad (1)$$

where CO is cardiac output and CaO<sub>2</sub> is arterial oxygen content, which itself is the sum of oxygen bound to hemoglobin [product of hemoglobin concentration (Hb) and arterial O<sub>2</sub> saturation (SaO<sub>2</sub>)] and physically dissolved oxygen [arterial PO<sub>2</sub> (PaO<sub>2</sub>)]:

$$CaO_2 = (Hb \times 1.36 \times SaO_2) + (PaO_2 \times 0.0031) \quad (2)$$

Oxygen demand can be summarized in the whole-body oxygen consumption (VO<sub>2</sub>), which is expressed mathematically by the Fick principle as the product of CO and arteriovenous O<sub>2</sub> content difference (CaO<sub>2</sub>–CvO<sub>2</sub>):

$$VO_2 = CO \times (CaO_2 - CvO_2) \quad (3)$$

where mixed venous O<sub>2</sub> content (CvO<sub>2</sub>) is:

$$CvO_2 = (Hb \times 1.36 \times SvO_2) + (PvO_2 \times 0.0031) \quad (4)$$

Equation 3 may be transposed to:

$$CvO_2 = CaO_2 - \frac{VO_2}{CO} \quad (5)$$

As physically dissolved oxygen can be neglected, Eq. 5 may be written as:

$$\begin{aligned} Hb \times 1.36 \times SvO_2 &\approx (Hb \times 1.36 \times SaO_2) - \frac{VO_2}{CO} \\ \Leftrightarrow SvO_2 &\sim \frac{VO_2}{CO} \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

Equation 6 also demonstrates that SvO<sub>2</sub> is directly proportional to the ratio of VO<sub>2</sub> to CO. Thus SvO<sub>2</sub> reflects the relationship between whole-body O<sub>2</sub> consumption and cardiac output. Indeed, it has been shown that the SvO<sub>2</sub> is well correlated with the ratio of O<sub>2</sub> supply to demand [3].

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### Introduction

The primary physiological task of the cardiovascular system is to deliver enough oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) to meet the metabolic demands of the body. Shock and tissue hypoxia occur when the cardiorespiratory system is unable to cover metabolic demand adequately. Sustained tissue hypoxia is one of the most important cofactors in the pathophysiology of organ dysfunction [1]. Therefore determining the adequacy of tissue oxygenation in critically ill patients is central to ascertain the health of the patient. Unfortunately, normal values in blood pressure, central venous pressure, heart rate, and blood gases do not rule out tissue hypoxia or imbalances between whole-body oxygen supply and demand [2]. This discrepancy has led to increased interest in more direct indicators of adequacy of tissue oxygenation such as mixed and central venous oxygen saturations. Pulmonary artery catheterization allows obtaining true mixed venous oxygen saturation (SvO<sub>2</sub>) while measuring central venous oxygen saturation (ScvO<sub>2</sub>) via central venous catheter reflects principally the degree of oxygen extraction from the brain and the upper part of the body. This brief review discusses the role and limitations of SvO<sub>2</sub> and ScvO<sub>2</sub> as indicators of the adequacy of tissue oxygenation.

## Pathophysiology of central or mixed venous O<sub>2</sub> saturation during shock

Usually VO<sub>2</sub> is independent of DO<sub>2</sub> since tissues can maintain O<sub>2</sub> needs by increasing O<sub>2</sub> extraction when DO<sub>2</sub> decreases. However, this mechanism has its limits. Below a so-called critical DO<sub>2</sub> compensatory increase in O<sub>2</sub> extraction is exhausted, and VO<sub>2</sub> becomes dependent on DO<sub>2</sub>. In this case tissue hypoxia occurs, and a rise in serum lactate levels may be observed [4].

A decrease in SvO<sub>2</sub> and ScvO<sub>2</sub> represents an increased metabolic stress, because the O<sub>2</sub> demands of the body are not completely met by DO<sub>2</sub>. The causes of a decreasing SvO<sub>2</sub> are multiple and reflect the forces operative in Eqs. 5 and 6. That is, either DO<sub>2</sub> does not increase in such a way to cover an increased VO<sub>2</sub>, or DO<sub>2</sub> drops because of decrease in either arterial O<sub>2</sub> content, cardiac output, or both. Importantly, the normal cardiovascular response of increasing VO<sub>2</sub> is to increase O<sub>2</sub> extraction and cardiac output. Thus SvO<sub>2</sub> normally decreases during exercise despite increasing DO<sub>2</sub>. Therefore a drop in SvO<sub>2</sub> or ScvO<sub>2</sub> does not necessarily mean that tissue hypoxia occurs. The magnitude of the decrease indicates the extent to which the physiological reserves are stressed (Table 1). Whereas in otherwise healthy individuals anaerobic metabolism may occur when SvO<sub>2</sub> drops below its normal value of 75% to 30–40% for a substantial period of time, patients with chronic heart failure may live with an SvO<sub>2</sub> in this low range without apparent tissue hypoxia, presumably because they have adapted to higher oxygen extraction. These patients can increase their VO<sub>2</sub> to a limited degree, however, because O<sub>2</sub> extraction is close to its limits as is cardiac output.

The cardiocirculatory system may be challenged by two different conditions. Firstly, a drop in DO<sub>2</sub> can be induced by anemia, hypoxia, hypovolemia, or heart failure. Secondly, fever, pain, stress etc. may also decrease SvO<sub>2</sub> or ScvO<sub>2</sub> by increasing whole-body VO<sub>2</sub> (Table 2)

Since central venous catheterization is commonly performed for a variety of reasons in critically ill patients, it would be useful if ScvO<sub>2</sub> could function as a surrogate for SvO<sub>2</sub>. The central venous catheter sampling site usually resides in the superior vena cava. Thus central venous blood sampling reflects the venous blood of the upper body but neglects venous blood from the lower body (i.e., intra-abdominal organs). As presented in Fig. 1, venous O<sub>2</sub> saturations differ among several organ systems since they extract different amounts of O<sub>2</sub>. ScvO<sub>2</sub> is usually less than SvO<sub>2</sub> by about 2–3% because the lower body extracts less O<sub>2</sub> than the upper body making inferior vena caval O<sub>2</sub> saturation higher. The primary cause of the lower O<sub>2</sub> extraction is that many of the vascular circuits that drain into the inferior vena cava use blood flow for nonoxidative phosphorylation needs (e.g., renal blood flow, portal flow, hepatic blood flow). However, SvO<sub>2</sub> and ScvO<sub>2</sub> change in parallel when the whole-body ratio of O<sub>2</sub> supply to demand is altered [5].

**Table 1** Limits of mixed venous oxygen saturation

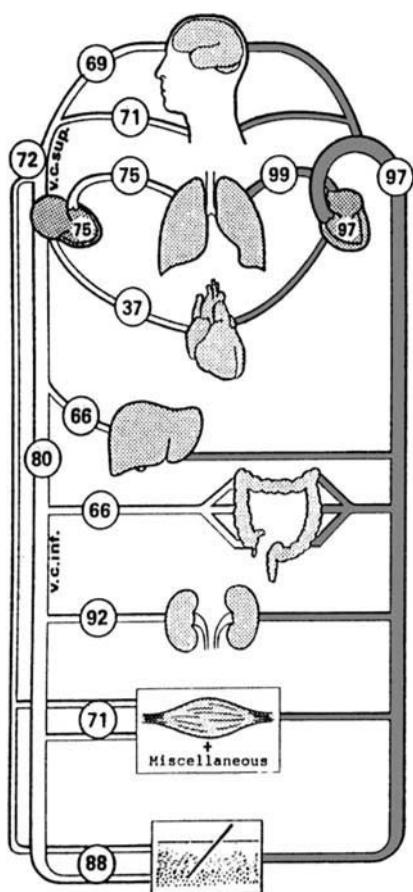
SvO <sub>2</sub> >75%	Normal extraction
75% >SvO <sub>2</sub> >50%	O <sub>2</sub> supply >O <sub>2</sub> demand Compensatory extraction Increasing O <sub>2</sub> demand or decreasing O <sub>2</sub> supply
50% >SvO <sub>2</sub> >30%	Exhaustion of extraction Beginning of lactic acidosis O <sub>2</sub> supply <O <sub>2</sub> demand
30% >SvO <sub>2</sub> >25%	Severe lactic acidosis
SvO <sub>2</sub> <25%	Cellular death

**Table 2** Clinical conditions and their effects on O<sub>2</sub> delivery and O<sub>2</sub> consumption and on venous oximetry

<b>Decrease in ScvO<sub>2</sub>/SvO<sub>2</sub></b>
<b>O<sub>2</sub> consumption ↑</b>
Stress
Pain
Hyperthermia
Shivering
<b>O<sub>2</sub> delivery ↓</b>
CaO <sub>2</sub> ↓ (anemia, hypoxia)
Cardiac output ↓
<b>Increase in ScvO<sub>2</sub>/SvO<sub>2</sub></b>
<b>O<sub>2</sub> delivery ↑</b>
CaO <sub>2</sub> ↑
Cardiac output ↑
<b>O<sub>2</sub> consumption ↓</b>
Analgesia
Sedation
Mechanical ventilation
Hypothermia

The difference between the absolute value of ScvO<sub>2</sub> and SvO<sub>2</sub> changes under conditions of shock [6]. In septic shock ScvO<sub>2</sub> often exceeds SvO<sub>2</sub> by about 8% [7]. During cardiogenic or hypovolemic shock mesenteric and renal blood flow decreases followed by an increase in O<sub>2</sub> extraction in these organs. In septic shock regional O<sub>2</sub> consumption of the gastrointestinal tract and hence regional O<sub>2</sub> extraction increases despite elevated regional blood flows [8]. On the other hand, cerebral blood flow is maintained over some period in shock. This would cause a delayed drop of ScvO<sub>2</sub> in comparison to SvO<sub>2</sub>, and the correlation between these two parameters would worsen. Some authors therefore argued that ScvO<sub>2</sub> cannot be used as surrogate for SvO<sub>2</sub> under conditions of circulatory shock [9].

However, changes in SvO<sub>2</sub> are closely mirrored by changes in ScvO<sub>2</sub> under experimental [10] and clinical conditions [7] despite a variable difference between these two variables. This may explain why Rivers et al. [11] were able to use ScvO<sub>2</sub> higher than 70% in addition to conventional hemodynamic parameters as therapeutic endpoint for hemodynamic resuscitation to improve outcome in patients with severe sepsis and septic shock. From a physiological point of view, SvO<sub>2</sub> monitoring for “early goal directed therapy” should provide similar re-



**Fig. 1** Arterial and venous oxygen saturations in various vascular regions [2]

sults. Given the fact that  $\text{ScvO}_2$  exceeds  $\text{SvO}_2$  on average by 8% in patients with septic shock, an  $\text{SvO}_2$  of about 62–65% should suffice as endpoint for hemodynamic resuscitation in these conditions, although this has not been tested prospectively. However, the placement of pulmonary artery catheters and the potentially higher risk of this should not result in a delay in the start of the resuscitation of critically ill patients.

Venous oximetry can reflect the adequacy of tissue oxygenation only if the tissue is still capable of extracting  $\text{O}_2$ . In the case of arteriovenous shunting on the microcirculatory level or cell death,  $\text{SvO}_2$  and  $\text{ScvO}_2$  may not decrease or even show elevated values despite severe tissue hypoxia. As demonstrated in patients after prolonged cardiac arrest, venous hyperoxia with an  $\text{ScvO}_2$  higher than 80% is indicative of impaired oxygen use [12].

## Conclusion

Low values of  $\text{SvO}_2$  or  $\text{ScvO}_2$  indicate a mismatch between  $\text{O}_2$  delivery and tissue  $\text{O}_2$  need. While measurement of  $\text{SvO}_2$  requires the insertion of a pulmonary artery catheter, measurement of  $\text{ScvO}_2$  requires only central venous catheterization.  $\text{ScvO}_2$  directed early goal-directed therapy improves survival in patients with septic shock who are treated in an emergency department. However,  $\text{ScvO}_2$  values may differ from  $\text{SvO}_2$  values, and this difference varies in direction and magnitude with cardiovascular insufficiency.  $\text{ScvO}_2$  should not be used alone in the assessment of the cardiocirculatory system but combined with other cardiocirculatory parameters and indicators of organ perfusion such as serum lactate concentration and urine output.

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## Relation between $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ ratio and $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ : a mathematical description

### Introduction

The acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) is characterized by severe hypoxemia, a cornerstone element in its definition. Numerous indices have been used to describe this hypoxemia, such as the arterial to alveolar  $\text{O}_2$  difference, the intrapulmonary shunt fraction, the oxygen index and the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio. Of these different indices the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio has been adopted for routine use because of its simplicity. This ratio is included in most ARDS definitions, such as the Lung Injury Score [1] and in the American–European Consensus Conference Definition [2]. Ferguson et al. recently proposed a new definition including static respiratory system compliance and  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  measurement with PEEP set above 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, but  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  was still not fixed [3]. Important for this discussion, the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio is influenced not only by ventilator settings and PEEP but also by  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ . First, changes in  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  influence the intrapulmonary shunt fraction, which equals the true shunt plus ventilation–perfusion mismatching. At  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  1.0, the effects of ventilation–perfusion mismatch are eliminated and true intrapulmonary shunt is measured. Thus, the estimated shunt fraction may decrease as  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  increases if V/Q mismatch is a major component in inducing hypoxemia

(e.g., chronic obstructive lung disease and asthma). Second, at an  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  of 1.0 absorption atelectasis may occur, increasing true shunt [4]. Thus, at high  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  levels ( $> 0.6$ ) true shunt may progressively increase but be reversible by recruitment maneuvers. Third, because of the complex mathematical relationship between the oxy-hemoglobin dissociation curve, the arterio-venous  $\text{O}_2$  difference, the  $\text{PaCO}_2$  level and the hemoglobin level, the relation between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio and  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  is neither constant nor linear, even when shunt remains constant.

Gowda et al. [5] tried to determine the usefulness of indices of hypoxemia in ARDS patients. Using the 50-compartment model of ventilation–perfusion inhomogeneity plus true shunt and dead space, they varied the  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  between 0.21 and 1.0. Five indices of  $\text{O}_2$  exchange efficiency were calculated ( $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ , venous admixture,  $\text{P}(\text{A}-\text{a})\text{O}_2$ ,  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{alveolar PO}_2$ , and the respiratory index). They described a curvilinear shape of the curve for  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio as a function of  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ , but  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio exhibited the most stability at  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  values  $\geq 0.5$  and  $\text{PaO}_2$  values  $\leq 100$  mmHg, and the authors concluded that  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  ratio was probably a useful estimation of the degree of gas exchange abnormality under usual clinical conditions. Whiteley et al. also described identical relation with other mathematical models [6, 7].

This nonlinear relation between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ , however, underlines the limitations describing the intensity of hypoxemia using  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ , and is thus of major importance for the clinician. The objective of this note is to describe the relation between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  with a simple model, using the classic Berggren shunt equation and related calculation, and briefly illustrate the clinical consequences.

### Berggren shunt equation (Equation 1)

The Berggren equation [8] is used to calculate the magnitude of intrapulmonary shunt ( $S$ ), “comparing” the theoretical  $\text{O}_2$  content of an “ideal” capillary with the actual arterial  $\text{O}_2$  content and taking into account what comes into the lung capillary, i.e., the mixed venous content.  $\text{Cc}'\text{O}_2$  is the capillary  $\text{O}_2$  content in the ideal capillary,  $\text{CaO}_2$  is the arterial  $\text{O}_2$  content, and  $\text{CvO}_2$  is the mixed venous  $\text{O}_2$  content,

$$S = \frac{\dot{Q}_s}{\dot{Q}_t} = \frac{(\text{Cc}'\text{O}_2 - \text{CaO}_2)}{(\text{Cc}'\text{O}_2 - \text{CvO}_2)}$$

This equation can be written incorporating the arterio-venous difference (AVD) as:

$$\text{Cc}'\text{O}_2 - \text{CaO}_2 = \left( \frac{S}{1-S} \right) \times \text{AVD}.$$

Blood  $\text{O}_2$  contents are calculated from  $\text{PO}_2$  and hemoglobin concentrations as:

### Equation of oxygen content (Equation 2)

$$\text{CO}_2 = (\text{Hb} \times \text{SO}_2 \times 1.34) + (\text{PO}_2 \times 0.0031)$$

The formula takes into account the two forms of oxygen carried in the blood, both that dissolved in the plasma and that bound to hemoglobin. Dissolved  $\text{O}_2$  follows Henry’s law – the amount of  $\text{O}_2$  dissolved is proportional to its partial pressure. For each mmHg of  $\text{PO}_2$  there is 0.003 ml  $\text{O}_2/\text{dl}$  dissolved in each 100 ml of blood.  $\text{O}_2$  binding to hemoglobin is a function of the hemoglobin-carrying capacity that can vary with hemoglobinopathies and with fetal hemoglobin. In normal adults, however, each gram of hemoglobin can carry 1.34 ml of  $\text{O}_2$ . Deriving blood  $\text{O}_2$  content allows calculation of both  $\text{Cc}'\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{CaO}_2$  and allows Eq. 1 to be rewritten as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & [(\text{Hb} \times \text{Sc}'\text{O}_2 \times 1.34) + (\text{Pc}'\text{O}_2 \times 0.0031)] \\ & - [(\text{Hb} \times \text{SaO}_2 \times 1.34) + (\text{PaO}_2 \times 0.0031)] \\ & = \left( \frac{S}{1-S} \right) \times \text{AVD} \end{aligned}$$

In the ideal capillary ( $c'$ ), the saturation is 1.0 and the  $\text{Pc}'\text{O}_2$  is derived from the alveolar gas equation:

$$\text{Pc}'\text{O}_2 = \text{PAO}_2 = (\text{P}_B - 47) \times \text{F}_1\text{O}_2 - \frac{\text{PaCO}_2}{R}.$$

This equation describes the alveolar partial pressure of  $\text{O}_2$  ( $\text{PAO}_2$ ) as a function, on the one hand, of barometric pressure ( $\text{P}_B$ ), from which is subtracted the water vapor pressure at full saturation of 47 mmHg, and  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$ , to get the inspired  $\text{O}_2$  fraction reaching the alveoli, and on the other hand of  $\text{PaCO}_2$  and the respiratory quotient ( $R$ ) indicating the alveolar partial pressure of  $\text{PCO}_2$ . Saturation,  $\text{Sc}'\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{SaO}_2$  are bound with  $\text{O}_2$  partial pressure ( $\text{PO}_2$ )  $\text{Pc}'\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{PaO}_2$ , by the oxy-hemoglobin dissociation curve, respectively. The oxy-hemoglobin dissociation curve describes the relationship of the percentage of hemoglobin saturation to the blood  $\text{PO}_2$ . This relationship is sigmoid in shape and relates to the nonlinear relation between hemoglobin saturation and its conformational changes with  $\text{PO}_2$ . A simple, accurate equation for human blood  $\text{O}_2$  dissociation computations was proposed by Severinghaus et al. [9]:

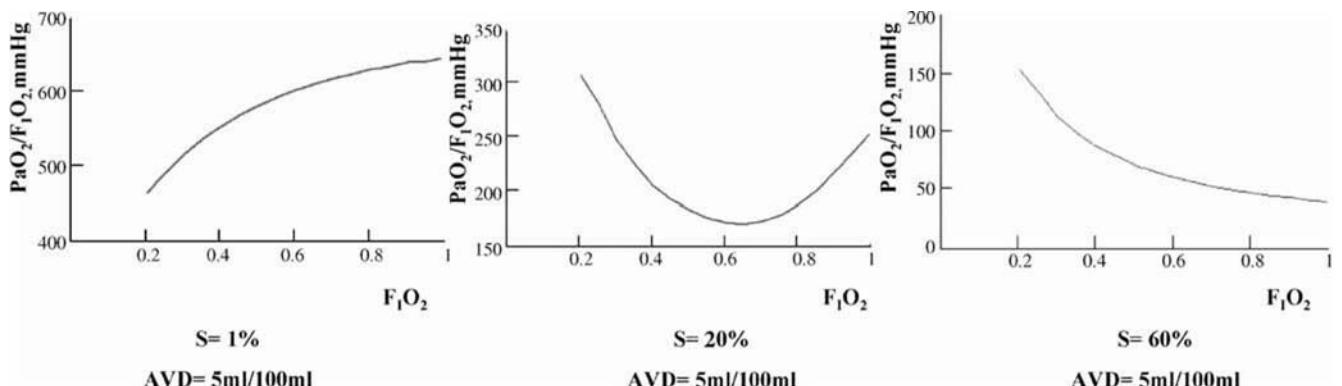
### Blood $\text{O}_2$ dissociation curve equation (Equation 4)

$$\text{SO}_2 = \left( \left( \left( \text{PO}_2^3 + 150\text{PO}_2 \right)^{-1} \times 23400 \right) + 1 \right)^{-1}$$

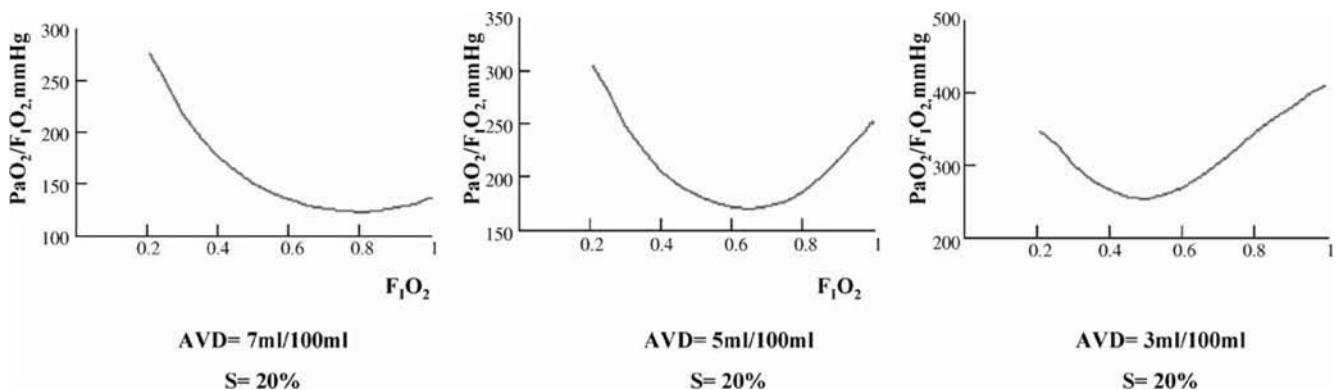
This equation can be introduced in Eq. 1:

$$\begin{aligned} & \left[ \left( \text{Hb} \times \left( \left( \left( (\text{P}_B - 47) \times \text{F}_1\text{O}_2 - \frac{\text{PaCO}_2}{R} \right)^3 \right. \right. \right. \right. \right. \\ & \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. + 150 \left( (\text{P}_B - 47) \times \text{F}_1\text{O}_2 - \frac{\text{PaCO}_2}{R} \right) \right)^{-1} \right. \right. \right. \right. \right. \\ & \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \times 23400 \right) + 1 \right)^{-1} \times 1.34 \right) + \left( \left( (\text{P}_B - 47) \right. \right. \right. \\ & \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \times \text{F}_1\text{O}_2 - \frac{\text{PaCO}_2}{R} \right) \times 0.0031 \right) \right] \\ & - \left[ \left( \text{Hb} \times \left( \left( \left( \text{PaO}_2^3 + 150\text{PaO}_2 \right)^{-1} \times 23400 \right) \right. \right. \right. \right. \right. \\ & \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. \left. + 1 \right)^{-1} \times 1.34 \right) + (\text{PaO}_2 \times 0.0031) \right) \right] \\ & = \left( \frac{S}{1-S} \right) \times \text{AVD} \end{aligned}$$

Equation 1 modified gives a relation between  $\text{F}_1\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{PaO}_2$  with six fixed parameters:  $\text{Hb}$ ,  $\text{PaCO}_2$ , the respiratory quotient  $R$ , the barometric pressure ( $\text{P}_B$ ),  $S$  and  $\text{AVD}$ . The resolution of this equation was performed here with Mathcad® software, (Mathsoft Engineering & Education, Cambridge, MA, USA).



**Fig. 1** Relation between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  and  $\text{FiO}_2$  for a constant arterio-venous difference (AVD) and different shunt levels ( $S$ )



**Fig. 2** Relation between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  and  $\text{FiO}_2$  for a constant shunt ( $S$ ) level and different values of arterio-venous differences (AVD)

### Resolution of the equation

The equation results in a nonlinear relation between  $\text{FiO}_2$  and  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio. As previously mentioned, numerous factors, notably nonpulmonary factors, influence this curve: intrapulmonary shunt, AVD,  $\text{PaCO}_2$ , respiratory quotient and hemoglobin. The relationship between  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  and  $\text{FiO}_2$  is illustrated in two situations. Figure 1 shows this relationship for different shunt fractions and a fixed AVD. For instance, in patients with 20% shunt (a frequent value observed in ARDS), the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio varies considerably with changes in  $\text{FiO}_2$ . At both extremes of  $\text{FiO}_2$ , the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  is substantially greater than at intermediate  $\text{FiO}_2$ . In contrast, at extremely high shunt ( $\geq 60\%$ )  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio is greater at low  $\text{FiO}_2$  and decreases at intermediate  $\text{FiO}_2$ , but does not exhibit any further increase as inspired  $\text{FiO}_2$  continue to increase, for instance above 0.7. Figure 2 shows the same relation but with various AVDs at a fixed shunt fraction. The larger is AVD, the lower is the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio for a given  $\text{FiO}_2$ . AVD can vary substantially with cardiac output or with oxygen consumption.

These computations therefore illustrate substantial variation in the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  index as  $\text{FiO}_2$  is modified

under conditions of constant metabolism and ventilation-perfusion abnormality.

### Consequences

This discussion and mathematical development is based on a mono-compartmental lung model and does not take into account dynamic phenomena, particularly when high  $\text{FiO}_2$  results in denitrogenation atelectasis. Despite this limitation, large nonlinear variation and important morphologic differences of  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio curves vary markedly with intrapulmonary shunt fraction and AVD variation. Thus, not taking into account the variable relation between  $\text{FiO}_2$  and the  $\text{PaO}_2/\text{FiO}_2$  ratio could introduce serious errors in the diagnosis or monitoring of patients with hypoxemia on mechanical ventilation.

Recently, the accuracy of the American-European consensus ARDS definition was found to be only moderate when compared with the autopsy findings of diffuse alveolar damage in a series of 382 patients [10]. The problem discussed here with  $\text{FiO}_2$  may to some extent participate in these discrepancies. A study by Ferguson et al. [11] illustrated the clinical relevance of this dis-

cussion. They sampled arterial blood gases immediately after initiation of mechanical ventilation and 30 min after resetting the ventilator in 41 patients who had early ARDS based on the most standard definition [2]. The changes in ventilator settings chiefly consisted of increasing  $F_1O_2$  to 1.0. In 17 patients (41%), the hypoxemia criterion for ARDS persisted after this change ( $PaO_2/F_1O_2 < 200$  mmHg), while in the other 24 patients (58.5%) the  $PaO_2/F_1O_2$  had become greater than 200 mmHg after changing the  $F_1O_2$ , essentially “curing” them of their ARDS in a few minutes. Of note, outcome varied greatly

between the “persistent” and “transient” ARDS groups. There was a large difference in mortality, and duration of ventilation, favoring the “transient” ARDS group. Thus, varying  $F_1O_2$  will alter the  $PaO_2/F_1O_2$  ratio in patients with true and relative intrapulmonary shunt of  $\geq 20\%$ . In clinical practice, when dealing with patients with such shunt levels, one should know that the increasing  $PO_2/F_1O_2$  with  $F_1O_2$  occurs only after  $F_1O_2$  increase to  $> 0.6$  (depending on the AVD value). Thus, the use of the  $PO_2/F_1O_2$  ratio as a dynamic variable should be used with caution if  $F_1O_2$ , as well as other ventilatory settings, varies greatly.

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## Pulmonary vascular resistance A meaningless variable?

nants of resistance. Numerous painstaking measurements of pressures at variable continuous streamlined flows of Newtonian and non-Newtonian fluids of different viscosities, through variable dimension capillary glass tubes, led to what is presently known as Poiseuille's law. It states that the resistance  $R$  to flow, defined as a pressure drop ( $\Delta P$ ) to flow ( $Q$ ) ratio, is equal to the product of the length ( $l$ ) of the tube by a viscosity constant ( $\eta$ ) divided by the product of fourth power of the internal radius ( $r$ ) by  $\pi$ :

$$R = \Delta P/Q = 8 \cdot l \cdot \eta / \pi \cdot r^4$$

### Introduction

Almost 20 years ago, Adriaan Versprille published an editorial in this journal to explain why, in his opinion, the calculation of pulmonary vascular resistance (PVR) is meaningless [1]. The uncertainties of PVR were underscored a year later by McGregor and Sniderman in the *American Journal of Cardiology* [2]. Obviously, both papers failed to convince. A Medline search from 1985 to the end of 2002 reveals no less than 7,158 papers with PVR calculations. What is it that could be wrong in all this literature?

### What is a resistance calculation?

A resistance calculation derives from a physical law first developed by the French physiologist Poiseuille in the early nineteenth century. Poiseuille invented the U-tube mercury manometer. He used the device to show that blood pressure does not decrease from large to small arteries to the then existing limit of cannula size of about 2 mm, and rightly concluded that the site of systemic vascular resistance could only be at smaller-sized vessels [3]. Since he could not penetrate to these minute vessels, he used small size glass tubes to investigate the determi-

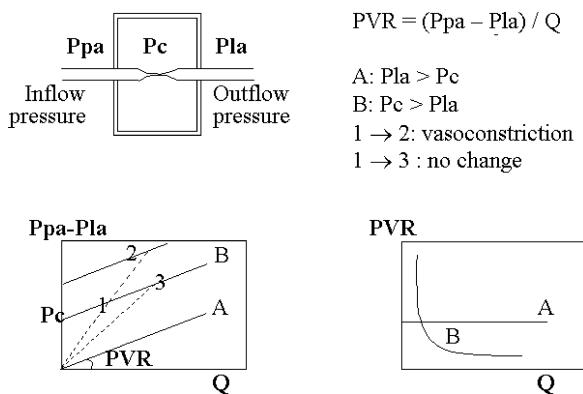
A remarkable feature of Poiseuille's resistance equation is its exquisite sensibility to changes in internal radius  $r$ , because it is at the fourth power.

### Transposition to the pulmonary circulation

The transposition of Poiseuille's law to the pulmonary circulation rests on the invalid assumptions that blood is a Newtonian fluid (that is with a velocity-independent viscosity), that the pulmonary resistive vessels are unbranched small rigid tubes of circular surface sections and that pulmonary blood flow is streamlined and non-pulsatile. But the approximations have less impact on calculated PVR values than the internal arteriolar radius, to which the Poiseuille's resistance variable is so sensitive. Accordingly, it is reasonable to calculate PVR as the ratio of the pressure drop through the pulmonary circulation [mean pulmonary artery pressure (Ppa) minus left atrial pressure (Pla)] to pulmonary blood flow ( $Q$ ) using the electrical principles described as Ohm's law:

$$\text{PVR} = (\text{Ppa} - \text{Pla}) / Q$$

The resulting PVR value is a valid indicator of structural changes at the small resistive pulmonary arteriole level,



**Fig. 1** Starling resistor model to explain the concept of closing pressure within a circulatory system. Flow (Q) is determined by the gradient between an inflow pressure, or mean pulmonary artery pressure (Ppa), and an outflow pressure which is either closing pressure (Pc) or left atrial pressure (Pla). When Pla is greater than Pc, the  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  relationship crosses the origin (A curve) and PVR is constant. When Pc is greater than Pla, the  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  relationship has a positive pressure intercept (B curve) and PVR decreases curvilinearly with increasing Q. Also shown are possible misleading PVR calculations: PVR, the slope of  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  may remain unchanged in the presence of a vasoconstriction (from 1 to 2) or decrease (from 1 to 3) with no change in the functional state of the pulmonary circulation (unchanged pressure/flow line)

which is the major site of most types of acute and chronic pulmonary hypertension states.

### Pulmonary vascular pressure-flow relationships

However, PVR is flow-sensitive and this can be a source of confusion. The Ohm's law resistance equation of pressure drop divided by flow implies that the (inflow minus outflow) pressure difference as a function of flow is linear and crosses the origin. If correct, resistance would be independent of either flow or pressure (Fig. 1). A PVR calculation assumes that if one were to increase Ppa and examine the resultant Ppa/Q relationship, it would display an extrapolated pressure axis intercept at a value equal to Pla. This assumption appears valid in well-oxygenated healthy lungs. Accordingly, normal healthy lungs appear to be fully recruited and maximally distended. Also, in intact animal models, progressive decreases in pulmonary vascular pressures with their associated decreasing flow do not induce a systemic baroreflex, thus changes in pulmonary sympathetic vasomotor tone is constant over a wide range of pulmonary arterial pressures and flow. However, hypoxia and many cardiac and respiratory diseases increase both the slope (PVR) and the extrapolated intercepts of multipoint  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  plots. Importantly, these pulmonary vascular pressure-flow relations still tend to remain linear over a physiological range of flows [2].

How is it possible that the extrapolated pressure intercepts of  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  plots are positive, meaning that the apparent back-flow pressure for pulmonary blood flow exceeds Pla? A possible answer is that pulmonary vessels are collapsible. Consider a circulatory system made of two rigid tubes connected by a collapsible tube surrounded by a pressure chamber (Fig. 1). This model is called the "Starling resistor", because Starling used such a device in his heart-lung preparation to control arterial blood pressure. If the outflow pressure (Pla) is higher than the chamber pressure (Pc), then several aspects of the circulation exist. First, flow starts when the inflow pressure (Ppa) is higher than Pla and it increases linearly with the increase in the Ppa–Pla difference. Second, the  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  line crosses the origin. And third, PVR, the slope of the  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  relationship, is constant. If the Pc is higher than Pla, however, then flow starts when Ppa is higher than Pc, independent of the lower Pla value, and flow increases linearly with the increase in  $(Ppa - Pla)$ . The Pla is also referred to as the closing pressure, because when intraluminal pressure decreases below Pla, the vessels collapse and flow ceases. Importantly, both the  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  line has a positive extrapolated intercept that is equal to Pla and PVR decreases with increasing flow. If either alveolar pressure or pulmonary vascular tone are increased enough to cause vascular collapse at values above Pla, then these conditions will also exist *in vivo*.

Permutt et al. conceived a vascular waterfall model made of parallel collapsible vessels with a distribution of closing pressures [4]. At low flow, these vessels would be progressively derecruited, accounting for a low flow Ppa/Q curve that is concave to the flow axis and intercepts the pressure axis at the lowest closing pressure to be overcome to generate a flow. At higher flows, completed recruitment and negligible distension account for a linear Ppa/Q curve with an extrapolated pressure intercept representing a weighted mean of all the parallel circuit Pla values. In this model, the mean Pla is the effective outflow pressure of the pulmonary circulation. A Pla lower than the mean Pla is then only an apparent downstream pressure, irrelevant to flow as is the height of a waterfall. Resistance calculations remain applicable to evaluate the functional state of the pulmonary circulation even in these conditions, provided that the apparent downstream pressure (Pla) is replaced by the effective one (Pc).

But pulmonary vessels are also distensible. Accordingly, pulmonary circulation models have been developed that explain Ppa/Q relationships by a distribution of both resistances and compliances [5]. Positive extrapolated pressure intercepts of  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  plots can be predicted by concomitant increases in resistance and compliance of small resistive vessels [6]. Intuitively, one would rather imagine constricted vessels to be stiffer. However, it has been shown experimentally that con-

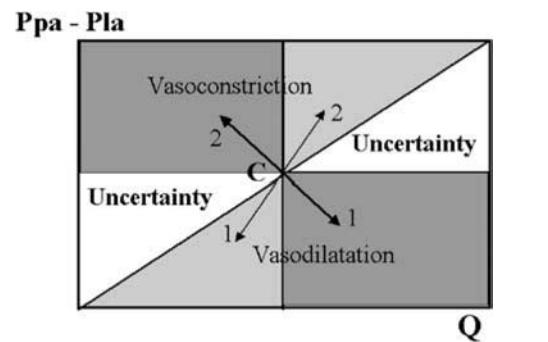
stricted arterioles become more distensible, probably because decreased surface section area places them on the steeper portion of the dimension-pressure curve.

In reality, provided a large enough number of Ppa/Q coordinates are generated and submitted to an adequate fitting procedure, Ppa/Q curves can always be shown to be curvilinear with concavity to the flow axis [7]. On the other hand, derecruitment can be directly observed at low pressures and flows. Both recruitment and distension probably explain most of the Ppa/Q curves. According to this integrated view, at low inflow pressures many pulmonary vessels are closed as their intrinsic tone and surrounding alveolar pressure exceed intraluminal pressure and those that are open are relatively narrow. As inflow pressure increases, previously closed vessels progressively open (recruitment) and previously narrow vessels progressively dilate (distension). Both mechanisms explain a progressive decrease in the slope of pulmonary vascular pressure/flow relationships (resistance) with increasing flow or pressure and account for apparent functional dissociation between Ppa and Q as reported, for example, in the acute respiratory distress syndrome [8].

### A pressure/flow diagram to avoid errors based on isolated pulmonary vascular resistance calculations

As illustrated in Fig. 1, PVR calculations can give misleading information under conditions of changing cardiac output. Vasomotor tone in subjects with pulmonary hypertension may appear to be either increasing or decreasing while, in fact, the functional state of the pulmonary circulation remains unchanged. In his original physiological note on this topic 17 years ago Versprille apologized to the clinicians for not being able to offer an alternative solution while pointing at the limitations of PVR measures [1]. However, PVR measures are similar to other composite variables in having inherent limitations. Systemic vascular resistance carries similar limitations and for related reasons. Importantly, when assessing pulmonary vasomotor tone, measurements of primary variables always minimize the inherent inaccuracies of calculating derived measurements. For example, in pulmonary hemodynamic studies, directly measured pressures and pulmonary blood flow can be plotted on a pressure/flow diagram (Fig. 2).

On such a diagram, connecting the central starting point C to the origin defines PVR. However, a closing pressure  $P_c$  higher than the apparent outflow pressure  $Pl_a$  is possible, which causes the pressure/flow line drawn from point C to cross the pressure axis at increasing pressures up to a maximum corresponding to a horizontal line. It is indeed physically impossible that  $(Ppa - P_c)$  would decrease at increasing flow. On the other hand, a  $(Ppa - Pl_a)/Q$  line cannot cross the pressure



**Fig. 2** Pressure/flow diagram for the interpretation of pulmonary hemodynamic measurements. The central point C corresponds to initial mean pulmonary artery pressure ( $Ppa$ ), left atrial pressure ( $Pl_a$ ) and flow ( $Q$ ) measurements. A decrease in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  at increased  $Q$  can only be explained by pulmonary vasodilatation. An increase in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  at decreased  $Q$  can only be explained by pulmonary vasoconstriction. Rectangles of certainty are extended to adjacent triangles because negative slopes or pressure intercepts of  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  lines are impossible. Arrows indicate changes in measured  $(Ppa - Pla)$  and  $Q$ , (1) vasodilatation, (2) vasoconstriction

axis at a negative pressure in the absence of a change in vasomotor tone. The  $(Ppa - Pla)/Q$  line and the line of maximum possible  $P_c$  at an actually measured initial point C determine a series of areas on the pressure/flow diagram. At increasing flow, any decrease in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  can only be vasodilatation. At decreasing flow, any increase in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  can only be vasoconstriction. In addition, a decrease in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  at decreasing flow that is more than predicted by the initial PVR equation can only be vasodilatation. An increase in  $(Ppa - Pla)$  more than predicted by the initial PVR equation can only be vasoconstriction. As shown in Fig. 2, zones of uncertainties remain because the actual value of closing pressure is not known. An additional uncertainty is related to the assumption that the pressure/flow coordinates are best described by a linear approximation, but this is generally reasonable in the absence of extreme changes in flow.

### Improved definition of pulmonary vascular resistance by a multipoint pulmonary vascular pressure/flow plot

Still, the resistive properties of the pulmonary circulation are best defined by the measurement of pulmonary vascular pressures at several levels of flow. The problem is to increase or to decrease flow with interventions that do not affect vascular tone. Exercise changes cardiac output but may lead to spuriously increased slopes with Ppa/Q plots [9]. This is probably due to exercise-induced pulmonary vasoconstriction, because of a decrease in mixed venous  $PO_2$ , sympathetic nervous system activation and

exercise-associated increase in left atrial pressure. A better option may be to increase flow by an infusion of low dose dobutamine. There is experimental evidence that dobutamine has no effect on pulmonary vascular tone doses below 10 µg/kg per min [10].

## Conclusions

The calculation of PVR is sensitive to pulmonary arteriolar tone and dimensions, but can be misleading when used to assess the functional state of the pulmonary circulation at increased or decreased cardiac output. In case of doubt, pulmonary hemodynamic determinations are better interpreted with the help of a pressure/flow diagram. The ideal is to define PVR using a multipoint pulmonary vascular pressure/flow plot.

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## Pulmonary artery occlusion pressure

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### Introduction

The bedside estimation of left ventricular (LV) performance of critically ill patients is an important aspect of the diagnosis and management of these patients. Ever since the introduction of the balloon flotation pulmonary catheterization, health care providers have used measurements of pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Ppao) to estimate both pulmonary venous pressure and LV preload. However, the significance of any specific value for Ppao in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular insufficiency in patients with diseases other than cardiogenic shock has never been validated. The reasons for this continued uncertainty reflect both intrinsic inaccuracies in the measurement of Ppao and misconceptions about their physiological significance. In this first Physiological Note we shall discuss problems in the accurate measurement of Ppao at the bedside, while in the second Physiological Note we shall discuss the physiological significance of Ppao measurements.

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### Measurement of pulmonary artery occlusion pressure

#### Balloon occlusion

Intravascular pressure, as determined using a water-filled catheter connected to an electronic pressure transducer, measures the pressure at the first point of flow and with a frequency response determined primarily by the stiffness and length of the tubing. Balloon occlusion of the pulmonary artery stops all flow distal to that point until the pulmonary veins converge about 1.5 cm from the left atrium. Thus, if a continuous column of blood is present from the catheter tip to the left heart, then Ppao measures pulmonary venous pressure at this first junction, or J-1 point, of the pulmonary veins [1].

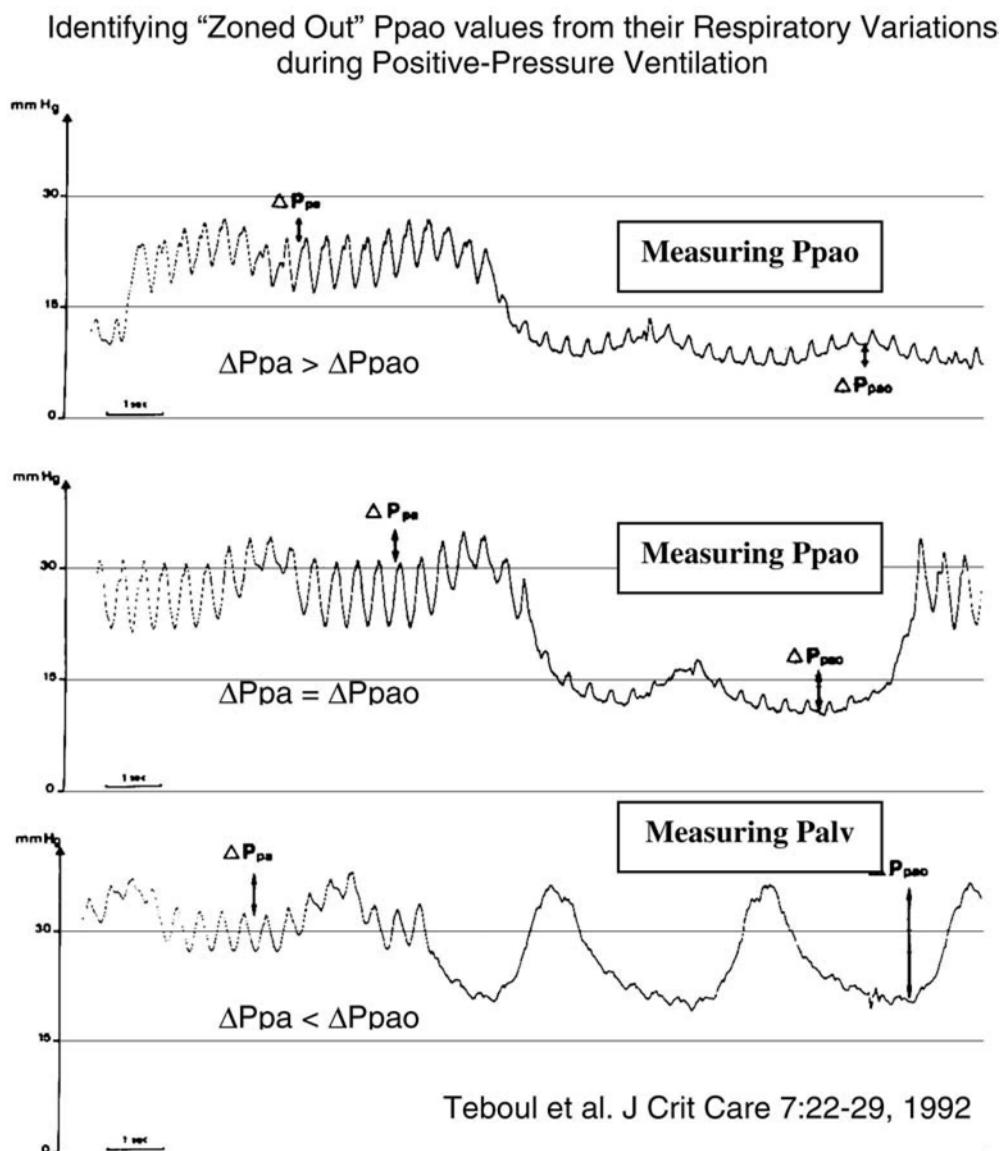
#### Hydrostatic influences

If one places the pressure transducer at a point lower than the catheter tip, then the pressure recorded will be greater than the pressure at the catheter tip by an amount equal to that height difference. Since pressure is usually measured in millimeters of mercury and the density of mercury relative to water is 13.6, for every 1.36 cm the transducer lies lower than the catheter tip the measured pressure will increase by 1 mmHg. Placing the transducer at the mid-axillary line references both the catheter tip and the transducer to a common cardiovascular point, such that even if the catheter tip is higher or lower than this reference point, the hemodynamic measure still uses the heart's level as zero [2].

#### Pressure profile during occlusion maneuver

The stiffer a vascular catheter is, the more faithfully it will transmit rapid changes in pressure at the catheter tip

**Fig. 1** Strip chart recording of pulmonary artery pressure (Ppa) to balloon occlusion (Ppao) as hemodynamic conditions change. Note the change in pressure waveform with occlusion and the logarithmic nature of the pressure decay. Also note that when alveolar pressure compresses the pulmonary capillaries, the change in Ppao during ventilation exceeds the change in Ppa



to the electronic pressure transducer. When a pulmonary arterial catheter's distal balloon is inflated, three things happen simultaneously (Fig. 1). First, the catheter rapidly migrates more distally into the pulmonary vasculature, carried by the force of pulmonary blood flow against the inflated balloon until it impacts upon a medium-sized pulmonary artery whose internal diameter is the same or less than that of the balloon. This rapid swing induces a ringing of the pressure system as the tip impacts onto the smaller vessel. Second, as downstream pulmonary blood flow ceases, distal pulmonary arterial pressure falls in a double exponential fashion to a minimal value, reflecting the pressure in the pulmonary vasculature downstream from the point of occlusion. Third, the column of water at the end of the catheter is now extended to include the

pulmonary vascular circuit up to the point of blood flow. Since the vasculature is compliant relative to the catheter, vascular pressure signals dampen. Thus, the two primary aspects of Ppao measurements are that they are less than pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure and their waveforms are damped relative to the non-occluded state.

#### Pulmonary capillary pressure

It is very important to understand that Ppao is not the pulmonary capillary pressure. The pressure at the capillary site, however, can be estimated from the pulmonary artery pressure tracing during an occlusion. At the in-

stant of balloon occlusion, the pressure distal to the catheter tip decreases as pressure and blood discharge into the downstream pulmonary vessels. Flow across the pulmonary vasculature can be considered to reflect two dynamic components: flow from a proximal pulmonary arterial capacitance system across an arterial resistance into a pulmonary capillary capacitance system, then across a pulmonary venous resistor into the pulmonary venous capacitor. Pressure in the latter is measured as Ppao. Thus, the downstream pulmonary arterial pressure decreases as the pulmonary arterial capacitor discharges its blood into the pulmonary capillary system. When the pressure in the pulmonary artery and capillary are equal, the pressure continues to discharge across the venous resistor. Plotting the log of pulmonary arterial pressure over time during its pressure decay can separate these two distinct pressure decay patterns. A clear inflection point is often seen, reflecting pulmonary capillary pressure. Usually it occurs two-thirds of the way between pulmonary diastolic pressure and Ppao, because two-thirds of the pulmonary vascular resistance is in the arteries.

By separating the pressure drop into arterial and venous components, one can calculate total pulmonary vascular resistance as the ratio of the difference between mean pulmonary artery pressure and Ppao to cardiac output, and pulmonary arterial and venous resistances as the proportional amounts of this pressure drop on either side of the capillaries [3]. Using such an analysis, it has been shown that, in acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), once pulmonary vascular obliteration occurs, pulmonary capillary pressure often exceeds Ppao by a considerable amount because pulmonary venous resistance increases. Thus, some "low pressure" pulmonary edema characterized by low Ppao values in a hyperdynamic state may actually reflect hydrostatic pulmonary edema.

Since the pulmonary vasculature has a measurable resistance, pressure inside the pulmonary arteries decreases along its length. The original pulmonary artery catheter method to measure left-sided pressures was to "wedge" a very small catheter into a small pulmonary arteriole, the so-called "wedge" pressure measurement. Wedge pressure is not Ppao. Since collateral flow and vessel diameter are different, wedge pressure tends to be slightly lower than Ppao values. Realistically, this is of little importance, except in remembering not to call Ppao "wedge pressure."

#### Airway pressure and pulmonary artery occlusion pressure

Since a continuous column of fluid is required for a stop-flow pulmonary arterial catheter to sense pulmonary venous pressure at the J-1 point, if alveolar pressure (Palv)

increases too much above left atrial pressure, the pulmonary vasculature in the zone of the occluded vessels may collapse such that the occlusion pressure senses actually reflect more airway pressure (Paw) than Ppao. Such conditions classically occur in West zones 1 and 2. However, under conditions in which Paw exceeds left atrial pressure, Ppao may still reflect left atrial pressure and its change. The reasons are two-fold. First, if the vascular region occluded is in a dependent region, then pulmonary capillary pressure will be greater than Ppao because of the effect of gravity on dependent vessels. Since balloon occlusion tends to occur in vessels with flow and more flow goes to dependent regions, this is a common event. However, even in non-dependent regions, a continuous column of fluid may persist in clear Zone 2 conditions (i.e. Paw >Ppao) when Paw is not much greater than Ppao. Presumably the corner vessel alveolar capillaries remain patent while the mid-wall capillaries flatten.

Once Paw increases enough relative to left atrial pressure, the distal tip of the balloon-occluded catheter senses Palv rather than Ppao. However, such conditions are easy to identify at the bedside because the respiratory increases in Ppao during this condition exceed the respiratory swings in pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure. This is because the pulmonary vasculature senses pleural pressure (Ppl) as its surrounding pressure, whereas the alveoli sense Paw as their pressure. With inspiration, transpulmonary pressure, the difference between Ppl and Paw, increases. Prior to balloon occlusion, pulmonary arterial pressures reflect a patent vasculature, thus pulmonary diastolic pressure will vary with pleural pressure. Thus, if Ppao senses Paw rather than Ppl, then it will increase more during inspiration [4] (Fig. 1).

#### Pleural pressure and pulmonary artery occlusion pressure

Ventilation causes significant swings in Ppl. Pulmonary vascular pressures, when measured relative to atmospheric pressure, will reflect these respiratory changes. To minimize the impact that ventilation has on the pulmonary vascular values measured, these variables are conventionally measured at end-expiration. This point is picked because it reflects a common point easily returned to even as ventilation changes, rather than the average hemodynamic position. During quiet spontaneous breathing, end-expiration occurs at the highest vascular pressure values whereas, during positive-pressure breathing, end-expiration occurs at the lowest vascular pressure values. With assisted ventilation, where both spontaneous and positive-pressure breathing coincide, it is often difficult to define end-expiration. In addition, a high respiratory drive during spontaneous or assisted breathing usually results in expiratory muscles recruitment, making end-expiration unreliable for estimating intravascular pressures [5]. These limitations are the primary

reasons for inaccuracies in estimating Ppao at the bedside.

### Positive-end expiratory pressure (PEEP) and hyperinflation

Even if one measures an actual Ppao value reflecting a continuous column of fluid from the catheter tip to the J-1 point and correctly identified end-expiration, one may still overestimate Ppao if Ppl is elevated. Hyperinflation, either due to extrinsic or intrinsic PEEP, will increase end-expiratory Ppl relative to the increase in PEEP and lung and chest wall compliance. Because Palv is partly transmitted to Ppl, end-expiratory Ppao overestimates LV filling pressure if PEEP is present. Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict with much accuracy the degree to which increases in PEEP will increase Ppl. One can remove a patient from PEEP to measure Ppao, but this will cause blood volume shifts with increases in Ppao that will not reflect the on-PEEP cardiovascular state. What the clinician needs is a measure of LV filling pressure while on PEEP. Regrettably, because of differences in lung and chest wall compliance among patients and changes in each over time, one cannot assume a fixed relation between increases in Paw and Ppl. Thus, in subjects with compliant lungs but stiff chest walls most of the increase in PEEP will be reflected in an increase in Ppl, whereas in those with markedly reduced lung compliance Ppl may increase very little, if at all, with the application of PEEP [6].

Two techniques allow for the accurate estimation of Ppao even if lung hyperinflation is present. In patients on PEEP without airflow obstruction, measuring Ppao at end-expiration while the airway is transiently disconnected (<3 s) results in a sudden loss of hyperinflation and a

fall in Ppao to a nadir value. This nadir Ppao value accurately reflects on-PEEP LV filling pressure in patients on 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O or less [6]. It may be accurate above this value, but that question has not been studied. However, in subjects with intrinsic PEEP, transiently removing them from a ventilator may not result in lung deflation to off-PEEP levels. Ppao values can still be measured, but using a more indirect technique. One may calculate a transmural value of end-expiratory Ppao as a ratio of airway to pleural pressure changes during a breath. Since Ppao will vary with Ppl and Paw can be measured directly, the proportional transmission of pressure from the airway to the pleural surface, referred to as the index of transmission (IT), equals the ratio of the differences between changes in Ppao and Paw during a breath. Thus, one may calculate the transmural Ppao = end-expiratory Ppao - (IT × total PEEP), where IT is an index of transmission of Palv to Ppao calculated as IT = (end-inspiratory Ppao - end-expiratory Ppao)/(plateau pressure - total PEEP). Paw needs to be transformed from centimeters of water into millimeters of mercury. Recall that total PEEP equals intrinsic plus extrinsic PEEP. This formula, though complicated, can be easily derived at the bedside from readily available values, and carries the added advantage of not requiring airway disconnection to derive it [7].

### Summary

Technical limitations in the accurate measurement of Ppao and its change in response to therapy are daunting, but surmountable. By using a firm understanding of the technical determinants of Ppao during ventilation one may measure it accurately at the bedside under almost any situation. In the next Physiological Note we shall address the physiological significance of Ppao values.

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Michael R. Pinsky

## Clinical significance of pulmonary artery occlusion pressure

**Abstract** *Background:* Ppao values are routinely used to assess pulmonary vascular status and LV performance. Regrettably, under many common clinically relevant conditions, even when Ppao values are measured accurately, Ppao values at baseline and in response to therapy often reflect an inaccurate measure of cardiovascular status.

*Results and conclusions:* Thus, caution should be used when applying measures of Ppao in determining therapy if changes in RV volume, hyperinflation, or LV diastolic compliance are simultaneously occurring.

**Keywords** Bedside measurements · Pulmonary hemodynamics · Left ventricular performance · Critically ill patients · Pulmonary artery occlusion pressure · Pulmonary vascular status

### Introduction

Balloon floatation pulmonary arterial catheterization has permitted the bedside estimation of pulmonary hemodynamics and left ventricular (LV) performance of critically ill patients. Present-day pulmonary artery catheters can routinely estimate cardiac output and right ventricular (RV) ejection fraction, by the thermodilution technique, mixed venous oxygen saturation, by reflective oximetry, and three intrapulmonary vascular pressures: right atrial, pulmonary arterial and pulmonary artery occlusion pressure. Of all of these, pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Ppao) is perhaps subject to the most error in its measurement and interpretation. The previous "Physiological Note" discussed problems in the accurate measure of Ppao at the bedside. In this one we discuss the physiological significance of Ppao measures.

Pulmonary artery occlusion pressure is used most often in the bedside assessment of: (a) pulmonary edema, (b) pulmonary vasomotor tone, (c) intravascular volume

status and LV preload, and (d) LV performance. We address each separately.

### Pulmonary edema

Acute pulmonary edema can be life threatening because of the systemic hypoxemia that it creates. Pulmonary edema can be caused by either elevations in pulmonary capillary pressure (hydrostatic or secondary pulmonary edema), increased capillary and/or alveolar epithelial permeability (primary pulmonary edema), or a combination of the two. If pulmonary capillary pressure increases above 18–20 mmHg, increased fluid flux across the capillary membrane occurs, promoting alveolar flooding. However, if capillary or alveolar cell injury is present, alveolar flooding can occur at much lower pulmonary capillary pressures. Measures of Ppao are commonly used to determine the cause of pulmonary edema. Thus Ppao values lower than 18–20 mmHg suggest a nonhydrostatic cause,

whereas values higher than 18–20 mmHg suggest a hydrostatic cause of pulmonary edema [1]. However, these are not hard values.

Ppao may be lower than 18–20 mmHg in a patient with secondary pulmonary edema if either the Ppao increase had been transient and is now gone, or if pulmonary capillary pressure significantly exceeds Ppao. Transient severe LV dysfunction can transiently increase Ppao during upper airway obstruction with vigorous inspiratory efforts (inspiratory stridor, obstructive sleep apnea), unstable angina (reversible ischemia), and arrhythmias. Increased pulmonary capillary pressure can occur due to massive sympathetic discharge (e.g., intracerebral hemorrhage and heroin overdose), which rapidly reverses, but the pulmonary edema lingers. Furthermore, persistently elevated pulmonary capillary pressures may co-exist with normal Ppao values if pulmonary venous resistance is increased and cardiac output not decreased (e.g., high altitude pulmonary edema, pulmonary veno-occlusive disease, and end-stage acute respiratory distress syndrome).

Ppao may be higher than 18–20 mmHg in a patient without hydrostatic pulmonary edema. Since Ppao is measured relative to atmospheric pressure, elevations in pleural pressure artificially elevate Ppao values. Any increase in pleural pressure increases measured Ppao. Hyperinflation, either intrinsic or extrinsic, increases pleural pressure. Furthermore, when active expiratory muscle effort persists, pleural pressure increases.

## Pulmonary vasomotor tone

Increased pulmonary arterial pressure (Ppa) impedes RV ejection, causing RV dilation and a decreased cardiac output. If pulmonary hypertension occurs rapidly, as with massive pulmonary embolism or marked hyperinflation, acute cor pulmonale and cardiovascular collapse also occurs. Pulmonary hypertension can be due to either an increase in pulmonary vasomotor tone or passive increases in Ppao due to LV failure. The pulmonary circulation normally has a low resistance, with pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure only slightly higher than Ppao and mean pulmonary arterial pressure thus a few mmHg higher than Ppao. Global pulmonary vascular resistance, by Ohm's law, equals the ratio of the driving pressure (mean Ppa–Ppao) and flow (cardiac output). Normal pulmonary vascular resistance is between 1.8 and 3.1 mmHg  $l^{-1} \text{ min}^{-1}$ . Usually these values are multiplied by 80 to give normal pulmonary vascular resistance range of 150–250 dynes  $s^{-1} /cm^{-5}$ . Thus by measuring Ppa, Ppao, and cardiac output in patients with pulmonary hypertension, one may determine whether the increase in Ppa is due to increased pulmonary vascular resistance (PVR) or a passive pressure build-up. If pulmonary hypertension is associated with an increased PVR then the

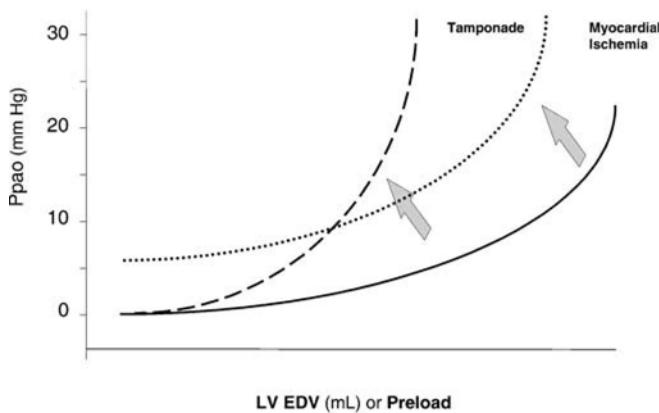
causes are primarily within the lung, whereas if PVR is normal then LV dysfunction is the more likely cause [2].

Regrettably, PVR is not a good measure of pulmonary vasomotor tone. Pulmonary vascular pressure does not decrease linearly from input to output and may vary from region to region due to lung distention, structural damage and acute processes, such as hyperinflation, pneumonia, emphysema, pulmonary fibrosis, and acute lung injury. Thus PVR as a lumped parameter may not identify local injury or define why PVR is elevated. As alveolar pressure increases above Ppao (West zone 2 conditions) alveolar pressure becomes the backpressure to pulmonary blood flow. Thus measures aimed at decreasing pulmonary vasomotor tone (e.g., inhaled nitric oxide) have little effect on Ppa [3]. Furthermore, with nonhomogeneous lung disease blood flow is preferentially shifted to those circuits with the lowest resistance, thus making the lung vascular pathology appear less than it actually is. By examining the change in Ppa in response to interventions that alter cardiac output, one may obtain a better understanding of the determinants of pulmonary hypertension. If the extrapolated zero-flow pulmonary artery pressure created from such a maneuver is much higher than Ppao, Ppao is probably not the downstream pressure to flow thus measures aimed at reducing zone 2 conditions (reverse hyperinflation) should be more effective at decreasing Ppa.

## Intravascular volume status and LV preload

Hemodynamically unstable patients often benefit from fluid resuscitation, as manifested by increases in organ perfusion and function, resolution of lactic acidosis, and increased survival. A fundamental tenant of such therapy is that fluid resuscitation increases LV end-diastolic volume (EDV), and that such increases in EDV translates into increased cardiac output. For a given level of contractile function, increasing LV EDV increases both LV stroke volume (and thus cardiac output) and LV stroke work. It is difficult to make repeated measures of LV EDV at the bedside to titrate fluid resuscitation and vasoactive therapy. Ppao values are often taken to reflect LV filling pressure, and by inference LV EDV. Operationally, subjects with cardiovascular insufficiency and a low Ppao are presumed to be hypovolemic and initially treated with fluid resuscitation, whereas patients with similar presentations but an elevated Ppao are not. Although there is no accepted high and low Ppao values for which LV under filling is presumed to occur, Ppao values lower than 10 mmHg are usually used as presumed evidence of a low LV EDV, whereas values higher than 18 mmHg suggest a distended LV [4].

Regrettably, of all the uses of Ppao in the management of the critically ill, this one use is the least accurate. The reasons for this are multiple and relate to the



**Fig. 1** Schematic representation of the relationship between left ventricular end-diastolic volume (LV EDV) and pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Ppao) under a variety of circumstances. *Solid line* Idealized LV diastolic compliance; *other two curves* increased external pressure and volume constraint (tamponade) and diastolic stiffening (myocardial ischemia), respectively

determinants of LV diastolic compliance and contractile function (Fig. 1) [5]. First, the relationship between Ppao and LV EDV is curvilinear and may be very different between subjects. Thus neither absolute values of Ppao or changes in Ppao define a specific LV EDV or its change. Second, Ppao is not the distending pressure for LV filling. Assuming that Ppao approximates left atrial pressure, it would poorly reflect LV end-diastolic pressure because it poorly follows the late diastolic pressure rise induced by atrial contraction and does not measure pericardial pressure, which is the outside pressure for LV distention. Thus changes in pericardial pressure alter LV EDV independently of Ppao. Hyperinflation, tamponade, and active inspiratory and expiratory muscle activity can rapidly alter pericardial pressure. Finally, even if one knew that pericardial pressure and Ppao do accurately reflect LV end-diastolic pressure, LV diastolic compliance can vary rapidly, changing the relationship between LV filling pressure and LV EDV. Myocardial ischemia, arrhythmias, and acute RV dilation can all occur over a few heartbeats. Thus it is not surprising that Ppao is a very poor predictor of preload responsiveness. The use of Ppao as a measure of LV EDV and preload responsiveness has not been validated by clinical trials. Accordingly, using Ppao to predict response to fluid resuscitation is not recommended, except at the extremes of Ppao values, and during those conditions one rarely needs to measure Ppao to make the correct diagnosis.

## LV performance

As stated above, LV EDV is a fundamental determinant of stroke volume and LV stroke work. The bedside as-

essment of LV performance is important in determining the causes of cardiovascular insufficiency and the potential of the patient to respond to fluid challenge, increasing arterial pressure and afterload reduction. Although many factors converge on the resultant LV stroke volume, including valvular function, synchrony of contraction, and diastolic filling time the four primary determinants of LV performance are preload (LV EDV), afterload (LV wall stress, which is itself the product of LV EDV and diastolic arterial pressure), heart rate, and contractility. To the extent that Ppao mirrors LV EDV, Ppao can be used to construct Starling curves that plot Ppao vs. LV stroke work (LV stroke volume  $\times$  developed pressure). Patients with heart failure can be divided into four groups depending on their Ppao ( $>$ or  $<$ than 18 mmHg) and cardiac index values ( $>$ or  $<$ 2.2 l min $^{-1}$  m $^{-2}$ ) [4]. Those patients with low cardiac indices and high Ppao are presumed to have primary heart failure, and low Ppao hypovolemia. Those with high cardiac indices and high Ppao are presumed to be volume overloaded, and low Ppao increased sympathetic tone.

Again, as above, if LV diastolic compliance is reduced or pericardial pressure increased, Ppao underestimates LV EDV. This interaction is the primary reason why both acute pulmonary embolism-induced cor pulmonale and PEEP-induced hyperinflation were erroneously thought to cause myocardial depression. In both clinical scenarios baseline Ppao values markedly increase without a proportional increase in stroke volume. Accordingly, the same limitations on the use of Ppao in assessing LV preload must be considered when using it to assess LV performance. Thus in subjects without lung or pericardial disease, tamponade, or pulmonary embolism the relationship between Ppao and LV stroke work can be used to assess LV performance.

## Summary

Ppao values are routinely used to assess pulmonary vascular status and LV performance. Regrettably, under many common clinically relevant conditions, even when Ppao values are measured accurately, Ppao values at baseline and in response to therapy often reflect an inaccurate measure of cardiovascular status. Thus caution should be used when applying measures of Ppao in determining therapy if changes in RV volume, hyperinflation, or LV diastolic compliance are simultaneously occurring.

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# Pulmonary capillary pressure

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## What are the components of the pressure drop across the pulmonary vasculature?

The resistance to flow across the pulmonary circulation results in the pressure drop from the large pulmonary artery to the left atrium. This resistance can be separated into arterial and venous components, with relatively little resistance seen in the compliant capacitance pulmonary capillary vessels. This physical situation can be modeled as an electrical circuit consisting of two or several resistances in series with one or several capacitors connected between the resistances (Fig. 1). The simplest model assumes one arterial and one venous resistance with one capacitance located in the capillaries [2, 3]. A three-compartment model consisting of compliant arterial, capillary and venous capacitance compartments between four resistances (resistance of large and small arterial and venous vessels, respectively) is probably more representative but does not improve the accuracy of measuring pulmonary capillary pressure [1].

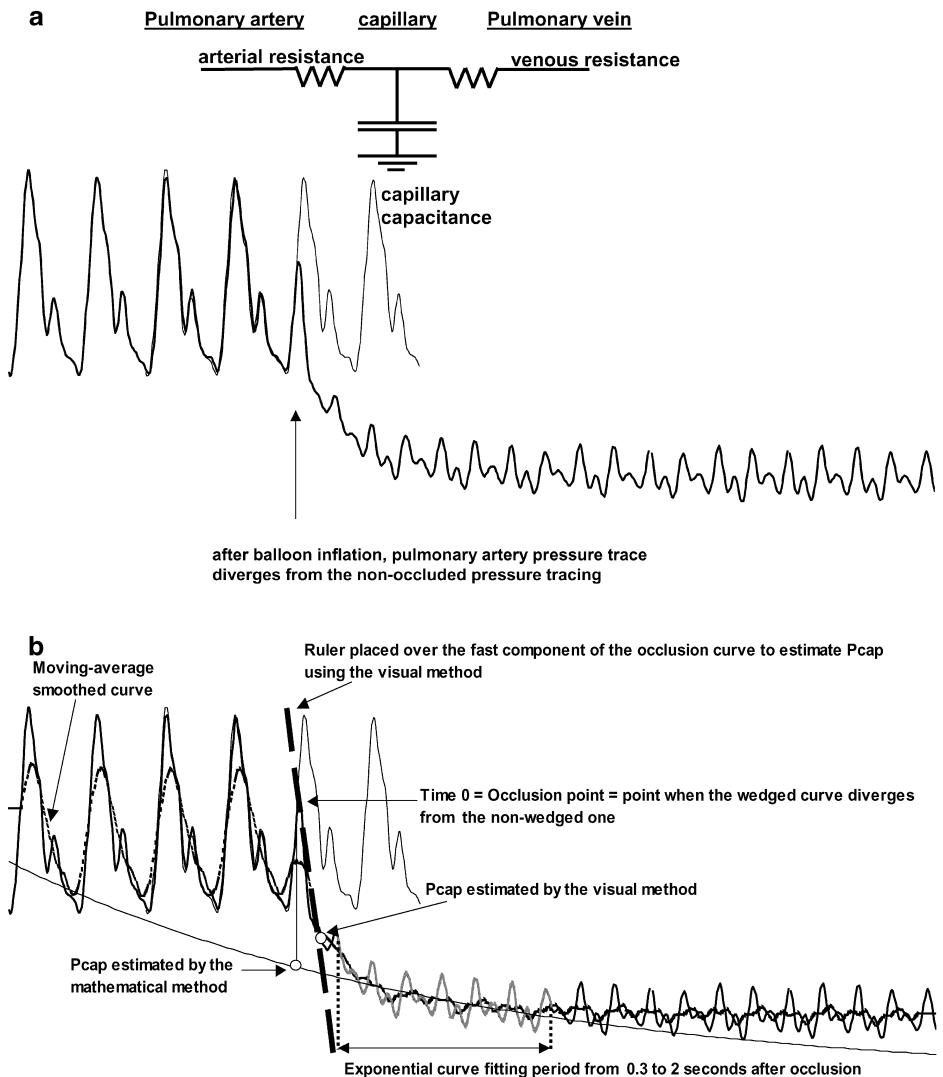
Because of this series resistance interposed by a compliant pulmonary capillary network, pulmonary capillary pressure can be measured from the pressure decay profile of an acute pulmonary artery balloon occlusion maneuver. When the pulmonary artery is occluded, there is a rapid decrease in blood flow as the occluded downstream pulmonary artery discharges its blood volume sequentially into the pulmonary capillaries across the arterial resistance and then into the pulmonary veins across the venous resistance. This two-part pressure discharge is reflected in the pulmonary artery pressure decay curve. The initial rapid pressure drop approaches the pressure in the capillaries (the main capacitance component) as the blood trapped in the downstream pulmonary capillaries equilibrates with pulmonary capillary pressure. This is followed by a slower pressure decrease approaching the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure as pulmonary capillary pressure equilibrates with pulmonary venous pressure (Fig. 1a). The initial pressure drop re-

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## Introduction

Pulmonary capillary pressure is a primary determinant of fluid flux across the pulmonary capillary wall [1]. Increasing pulmonary capillary pressure increases fluid flux out of the capillaries into the interstitium and in the extreme induces pulmonary edema. Pulmonary capillary pressure is itself determined by the mean pulmonary artery pressure, pulmonary vascular resistance, and total blood flow. The distribution of the pulmonary vascular resistance from precapillary arterial to postcapillary venous compartments varies. Accordingly, at any given blood flow rate the hydrostatic pressure in the pulmonary capillaries depends on the magnitude of the resistance to blood flow across the pulmonary circulation and its distribution between precapillary and postcapillary vessels. Since pulmonary capillary pressure cannot be directly measured, the presence and relevance of increased pulmonary capillary hydrostatic pressures to values in excess of pulmonary artery occlusion pressure are often overlooked.

**Fig. 1** A schematic representation of the electric circuit analogue of the pulmonary circulation is superimposed on the two pressure recordings. **a** Pulmonary artery pressure decay after the balloon of the Swan-Ganz catheter has been occluded. For better visualization the occlusion trace is superimposed on a nonoccluded trace, both recorded during an expiratory hold during mechanical ventilation. **b** Capillary pressure has been estimated from the trace shown in **a**. An additional trace using 20 data point moving average smoothing of the original trace (collected at 100 Hz) is superimposed on the curves. This further facilitates the visual estimation of the capillary pressure by defining more exactly the point of divergence of the occluded and nonoccluded curves. In addition, an exponential curve has been fitted on the curve 0.3–2 s after occlusion. This fitted curve has then been extrapolated to the time of occlusion to provide the capillary pressure



flects the proximal arterial resistance, and the slower pressure drop reflects the distal, venous resistance. The model shown in Fig. 1 consisting of serial resistance and capacitances does not represent the simultaneous discharge of the different capacitance components of the pulmonary circulation. Nevertheless, it provides a close approximation of the decay of pressure after a pulmonary arterial occlusion for most clinical conditions.

### What is the physiological relevance of the pulmonary capillary pressure?

Pulmonary capillary pressure is a major determinant of fluid flux across the capillary wall and lung edema formation. Under normal conditions some fluid and protein is filtered through the capillary into the pulmonary interstitium and subsequently drained into the systemic circu-

lation by the lung lymphatics. When the capacity of the lymphatics is exceeded, first interstitial and then alveolar edema ensues. The rate of fluid filtration from the capillary to the interstitium can be estimated by the Starling equation:

$$\text{Fluid efflux} = K_{fc} \times [(P_{\text{capillary}} - P_{\text{interstitium}})] - K_d [(\pi_{\text{capillary}} - \pi_{\text{interstitium}})]$$

where  $P$ =hydrostatic pressure,  $\pi$ =oncotic pressure,  $K_{fc}$ =capillary filtration coefficient (product of capillary wall hydraulic conductivity and capillary surface area), and  $K_d$ =reflection coefficient (values from 0 to 1; 0=capillary freely permeable to proteins, 1=capillary impermeable to proteins). When fluid efflux increases for any reason, lymph flow increases as well, washing out interstitial protein and decreasing  $\pi_{\text{interstitium}}$ , thus increasing the oncotic gradient for fluid flux back into the blood

and counteracting edema formation. When the permeability to protein increases, the influence of the term  $K_d$  ( $\pi_{\text{capillary}} - \pi_{\text{interstitium}}$ ) in the Starling equation is reduced due to the decreased  $K_d$  as well as the decreased ( $\pi_{\text{capillary}} - \pi_{\text{interstitium}}$ ) (loss of protein to the tissue). However, no matter what the oncotic pressure gradient, based on the Starling equation, increasing pulmonary capillary pressure always increases fluid efflux. If the capillary permeability to protein is normal, a higher capillary pressure is needed for a given rate of fluid efflux. Conversely, in the presence of increased capillary permeability, lower capillary pressure is needed for a given rate of fluid efflux.

Since the capillary pressure is the major determinant of fluid efflux from the capillaries both in normal and abnormal permeability states, division between "hydrostatic" or "cardiogenic" lung edema and "permeability" or "low-pressure" edema when pulmonary capillary pressure is unknown is artificial and arbitrary. Indeed, capillary hydrostatic pressure and capillary permeability interact in all types of lung edema. An increase in the pulmonary venous resistance increases the pulmonary capillary pressure. Under these conditions the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure or left atrial pressure underestimates the pulmonary capillary pressure [4, 5]. Furthermore, the pressure difference between pulmonary capillary pressure and left atrial pressure varies with blood flow. The higher the blood flow then for the same pulmonary venous resistance the greater the pulmonary capillary pressure and the greater the pressure drop.

### **How to interpret an increased transpulmonary pressure gradient?**

A positive pressure gradient must exist between the pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure and the left atrium for blood to flow. Under normal circumstances this gradient is less than 6–8 mmHg, increasing slightly with increasing flow and decreasing to near zero at rest when pulmonary blood flow almost ceases during each diastole. A widening gradient between the pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure and the left atrial pressure is a signal of increased pulmonary vascular resistance, increased pulmonary blood flow, or both, and is an indicator that pulmonary capillary pressure may exceed pulmonary artery occlusion pressure. While the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure may overestimate the left atrial pressure in the presence of Starling resistor forces causing pulmonary venous collapse [6], an increased gradient between the pulmonary arterial diastolic pressure and the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure is still a valid indicator of increased capillary pressure. An isolated increase in the arterial resistance does not increase the capillary pressure by itself.

Normally two-thirds of the transpulmonary pressure drop occurs over the arterial resistance, with approxi-

mately one-third of the pressure drop occurring over the venous resistance. However, a selective increase in pulmonary venous resistance can occur and directly increases pulmonary capillary pressure in proportion to blood flow. Many normal physiological responses and disease states are associated with increased pulmonary venous resistance. Increased pulmonary vasmotor tone occurs with hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction. If associated with increased blood flow, as with exercise at high altitude, one can rapidly understand how high altitude pulmonary edema may occur. Disease states associated with transient massive sympathetic discharge, such as acute cerebral hemorrhage and heroin overdose, produce transient massive increases in pulmonary capillary pressure. Finally, during the reparative phase of acute lung injury, pulmonary fibrosis may occur. Fibrosis is indiscriminate of the vasculature and obstructs all vessels, thus making increased pulmonary vascular resistance a hallmark of end-stage acute lung injury. Persistent pulmonary edema in a patient with late-stage acute respiratory distress syndrome may reflect occult hydrostatic pulmonary edema.

### **How can the pulmonary capillary pressure be estimated at the bedside?**

Bedside assessment of pulmonary capillary pressure is based on visual inspection of the pulmonary artery pressure decay during balloon occlusion using a balloon flotation pulmonary artery catheter [1, 2, 3] (Fig. 1). Ideally the occlusion should be performed during an expiratory hold to avoid the effect of dynamic changes in intrathoracic pressure and lung volume on the pressure curve. After occlusion, one sees a rapid decrease in pressure, followed by a slower pressure decrement approaching the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Fig. 1a). When a straight line is drawn tangent to the rapid component, pulmonary capillary pressure can be estimated as the point at which the pressure transient begins to deviate from the rapid portion of the pressure tracing (Fig. 1b). The assessment can be facilitated by the use of a strip chart recorder or a computer sampling of the signal, and by superimposing the occlusion tracing on a nonoccluded one (Fig. 1a). More sophisticated approaches include the use of moving average smoothing of the pressure signal and mathematical curve fitting of the signal (Fig. 1b). The visual inspection method has been thoroughly validated in experimental conditions and gives values very similar to those of the more complex approaches. In the clinical routine a rough estimate of capillary pressure can even be obtained directly from the monitor screen by freezing the pressure trace when measuring the pulmonary artery occlusion pressure.

To assess the risk of pulmonary edema in the presence of pulmonary hypertension and increased transpulmonary

ry pressure gradient it is necessary to estimate the capillary pressure. Importantly, once pulmonary capillary pressure is known, the arterial and venous components of the pulmonary vascular resistance can be calculated as the ratio of their respective pressure gradients (pulmonary artery diastolic to pulmonary capillary and pulmonary capillary to left atrial) to total blood flow. If pulmonary venous resistance is elevated, effective strategies to min-

imize pulmonary capillary pressure may include reducing total blood flow (hypothermia, sedation, paralysis) and the use of pulmonary vasodilator substances (inhaled nitric oxide, calcium channel blockers, and infusions of potent vasodilators such as prostaglandin E, prostacyclin, nitroglycerin, hydralazine) with appropriate intermittent monitoring of pulmonary capillary pressure to document its reduction.

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François Jardin

## Ventricular interdependence: how does it impact on hemodynamic evaluation in clinical practice?

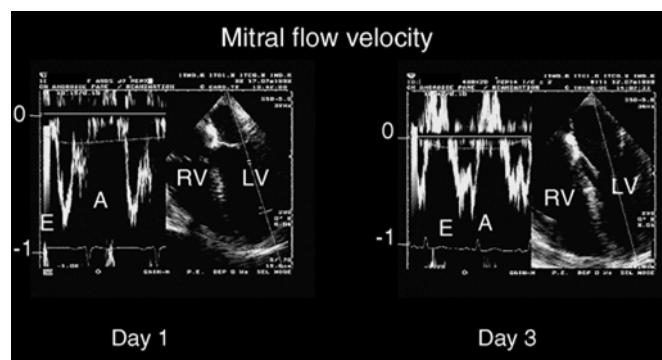
The left (LV) and right ventricles (RV) are enclosed in a stiff envelope, the pericardium. They have similar end-diastolic volumes, and there is no free space for acute ventricular dilatation within a normal pericardial space. Thus, when RV end-diastolic volume increases owing to increased RV loading, it can only occur at the expense of the space devoted to the left ventricle, which is prevented from dilating to as large an end-diastolic volume as it would otherwise given its distending pressure. From a practical point of view this reduced LV end-diastolic volume is accompanied by decreases in LV diastolic compliance, such that for the same LV distending pressure LV end-diastolic volume is less. This point was described in a previous Physiological Note [1]. LV impaired relaxation by RV enlargement is evidenced by Doppler examination of mitral flow velocity (Fig. 1).

Such competition for end-diastolic volume between the right and left ventricles is enhanced when mediastinal pressure (i.e., pleural, pericardial, or both) or lung volume are increased. Moreover, relative ventricular compliance, that is, the relation between LV end-diastolic pressure and LV end-diastolic volume, is markedly affected by pericardial pressure. If pericardial pressure were to increase but not accounted for in the calculation of LV distending pressure, LV diastolic compliance would appear to be decreased. Often esophageal pressure is used to estimate intrathoracic pressure and, by extension, pericardial pressure. Importantly, many processes

can alter pericardial pressure independent of esophageal pressure, such as hyperinflation, pericardial effusions and acute RV dilation

Another aspect of ventricular interdependence relates to the fact that both ventricles are arranged in series. Since LV filling requires RV output, adequate left ventricular filling can be only supplied by adequate RV output. In turn, adequate RV output requires adequate venous return, and nonobstructed pulmonary circulation.

*The “age of oil lamps”: ventricular interdependence renders inaccurate the classical hemodynamic evaluation by a pulmonary artery catheter.* For a long time, fluid management in critically ill patients requiring mechanical ventilation was guided by measurement of both RV and LV filling pressures. Moreover, evidence of de-



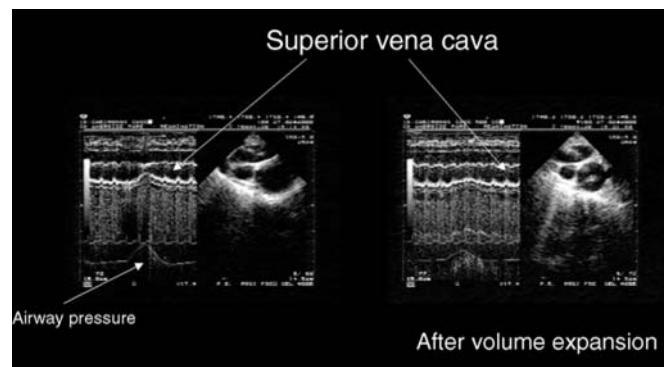
**Fig. 1** Illustration of left ventricular (LV) relaxation impairment by right ventricular (RV) dilatation, in a mechanically ventilated patient with acute respiratory distress syndrome. During the first day of mechanical ventilation (*left*) a normal right ventricular size, observed in the two-dimensional view, was associated with a normal pattern of Doppler mitral flow velocity, with a preeminent peak velocity of the E wave (early filling) and a less marked peak velocity of the A wave (atrial systole). After 48 h of respiratory support (*right*) right ventricular dilatation, observed on the two-dimensional view, was associated with a modified pattern of Doppler mitral flow velocity, with equalization of peak velocities

pressed systolic ventricular function was based upon observational changes in filling pressure related to changes in cardiac output during a fluid challenge. Pulmonary arterial catheterization is commonly used to assess these parameters. Direct measures of right atrial (or central venous, CV) pressure (P) and pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Ppao) can be made from a pulmonary arterial catheter. And using a distal tip thermistor, pulmonary blood flow as a surrogate of cardiac output can be measured. Clinically CVP is used to reflect RV filling pressure and Ppao LV filling pressure. This allows the construction of RV and LV "Frank-Starling curves" when filling pressures are plotted against stroke volume or cardiac output. It is theoretically possible to discriminate between an insufficient preload (requiring volume expansion) and a contractile defect (requiring inotropic support) in the hemodynamically unstable patient using this analysis.

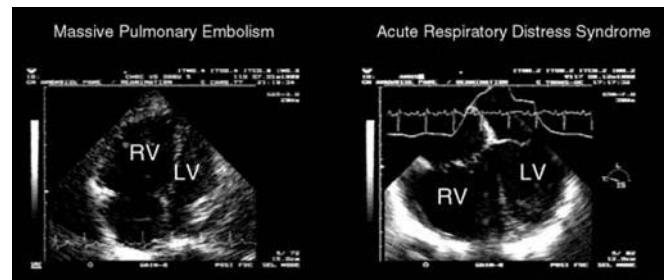
A major drawback of the above method results from the lack of measurement of ventricular volume. Since RV and LV diastolic compliance can and do vary rapidly in unstable patients, filling pressures or their changes in response to therapy may poorly reflect preload. Regrettably, at the present time it is not possible to measure diastolic compliance at the bedside. As a result a high filling pressure may coexist with a reduced preload if ventricular compliance is low, and a low filling pressure may coexist with a normal preload if ventricular compliance is high [2]. This drawback characterizes particularly patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome, in whom a progressive increase in PEEP produces a progressive increase in measured LV end-diastolic pressure, associated with a progressive decrease in LV end-diastolic size [3].

*The "age of electricity": ventricular interdependence does not affect the accuracy of hemodynamic evaluation by bedside echocardiography.* Whereas knowledge of ventricular diastolic compliance is fundamental in interpreting ventricular intracavitory pressure, it is less important with the use of echocardiography, which permits direct visualization of venous distention, biventricular maximal chamber size, and a rough approximation of systolic function.

In clinical practice, the adequacy of venous return under respiratory support can be evaluated by inspection of respiratory changes in the superior vena caval diameter (Fig. 2). In particular, a high collapsibility index (i.e., major expiratory diameter minus minor inspiratory diameter divided by major expiratory diameter) of the superior vena cava identified potential differences between measured CVP and actual RV filling pressure, because the external pressure for the vessel, which is pleural pressure, causes vascular collapse. Such a condition in a hemodynamically unstable person denotes a need for volume expansion [4].



**Fig. 2** Illustration of the gauge for central blood volume constituted by vena caval collapsibility. Before volume expansion (*left*) the patient exhibited a marked reduction in superior vena caval diameter during tidal ventilation. After volume expansion (*right*) inspiratory reduction in vena caval diameter was minimized



**Fig. 3** Two illustrations of ventricular interdependence, where acute right ventricular dilatation is associated with a reduced size of the left ventricular cavity. This interdependence was observed by a long-axis view, in a patient with massive pulmonary embolism (*left*, transthoracic examination) and in a patient with acute respiratory distress syndrome (*right*, transesophageal examination)

RV and LV end-diastolic dimensions can be obtained by bedside echocardiography. These measurements are particularly relevant in the clinical setting of acute cor pulmonale, where hemodynamic impairment resulting from ventricular interdependence has been documented (Fig. 3) [5]. Echocardiographic measurements of LV size has documented an inability of the left ventricle of septic patients to dilate [6].

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François Jardin

## Cyclic changes in arterial pressure during mechanical ventilation

For a given level of arterial distensibility, the amplitude of the arterial pulse is directly related to the left ventricular (LV) stroke volume. Thus, rapid changes in arterial pulse pressure, the difference between systolic and diastolic pressures, essentially reflect changes in LV stroke volume.

During mechanical ventilation, cyclic inspiratory increases in pleural pressure are transmitted to the intra-thoracic aorta, resulting in a cyclic inspiratory increase in arterial pressure [1]. However, this transmission of pleural pressure produces a similar increase in both systolic and diastolic pressures, and does not increase the arterial pulse pressure.

Cyclic changes in arterial pulse pressure during positive-pressure ventilation, in patients ventilated on controlled mode and without spontaneous breathing, can be described as a succession of inspiratory increases, followed by expiratory decreases [2]. The inspiratory increase in systolic arterial pressure observed in this setting has also been termed delta Up ( $\Delta$ Up) (Fig. 1, upper panel), whereas the expiratory decrease in systolic arterial pressure has been termed delta Down ( $\Delta$ Down) (Fig. 1, lower panel) [3].

Cyclic changes in arterial pulse pressure during respiratory support are produced by cyclic changes in pulmonary venous return altering LV preload. The main role

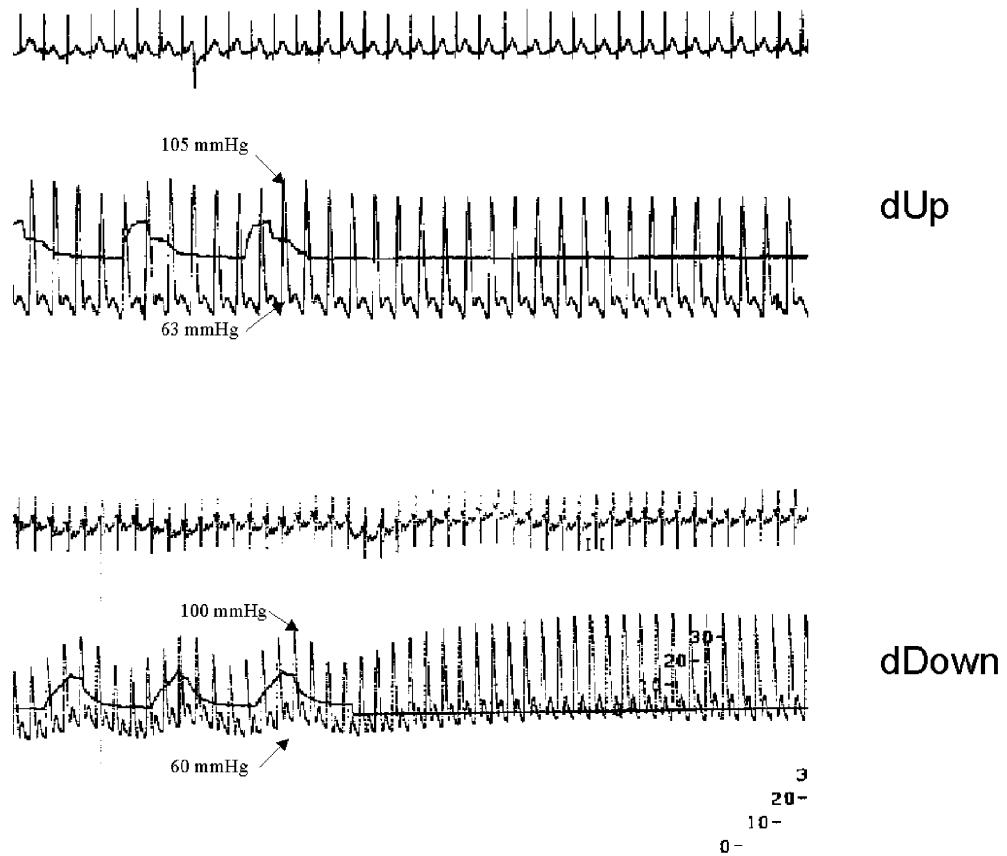
of inspiratory increase in transpulmonary pressure in determining these changes has been demonstrated by chest strapping in a clinical study performed in acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) patients [4]. Mechanical lung inflation produces a sudden increase in distal airway pressure, whereas, at the same time, pleural pressure increases to a lesser extent. As a result, transpulmonary pressure, i.e., alveolar pressure minus pleural pressure, is suddenly increased. These cyclic changes in transpulmonary pressure have an instantaneous impact on the pulmonary circulation, particularly on the capillary bed, which is intra-alveolar. The blood present in this capillary bed, approximately 100 ml, constitutes, with the blood present in pulmonary veins, the filling reserve of the left ventricle [2, 5, 6]. As a result, the pulmonary capillary bed is emptied, and LV filling is increased, resulting in an inspiratory increase in LV ejection [6].

At the same time, the sudden increase in transpulmonary pressure increases right ventricular (RV) outflow impedance [4], and produces a drop in RV ejection [6, 7]. This drop causes a delay in re-filling of the pulmonary capillary bed, and, as a consequence, a late inspiratory and early expiratory decrease in LV filling produces an expiratory decrease in LV ejection [6].

The amplitude of cyclic changes in arterial pulse pressure, pulse pressure variation (PPV), can be measured as a percentage of expiratory decrease, as proposed by Michard et al. [8]. In the original formula given by these authors,  $PPV = \text{maximal inspiratory value} - \text{minimal expiratory value}/1/2 (\text{maximal inspiratory value} + \text{minimal expiratory value})$  [8]. With the recently accepted respiratory strategy limiting airway pressure (low stretch strategy), PPV, which is present in all mechanically ventilated patients, is usually small, between 1% and 5%. This amplitude may be increased by either hypervolemia or hypovolemia.

When hypervolemia is present, the amount of blood filling the pulmonary capillary bed is increased, and,

**Fig. 1** Two illustrative examples of simultaneous recording of invasive arterial pulse and tracheal pressure in mechanically ventilated patients. In the upper panel, a short disconnection from the respirator shows that previous cyclic changes were exclusively produced by a  $\Delta$ Up (*dUp*). Conversely, in the lower panel, the same disconnection indicates that previous cyclic changes were exclusively produced by a  $\Delta$ Down (*dDown*). Note that systolic arterial pressure is in a normal range in the upper example, whereas it is low in the lower example



with each lung inflation, a greater amount of blood is boosted toward the left ventricle. This squeeze of blood enlarges PPV by increasing  $\Delta$ Up (Fig. 2, upper left panel). A rapid fluid removal may reduce PPV (Fig. 2, lower left panel). Importantly, this pattern of increased PPV is usually observed in patients with a normal or elevated arterial pressure, but may also occur in patients with low arterial pressure, especially if heart failure is present [3].

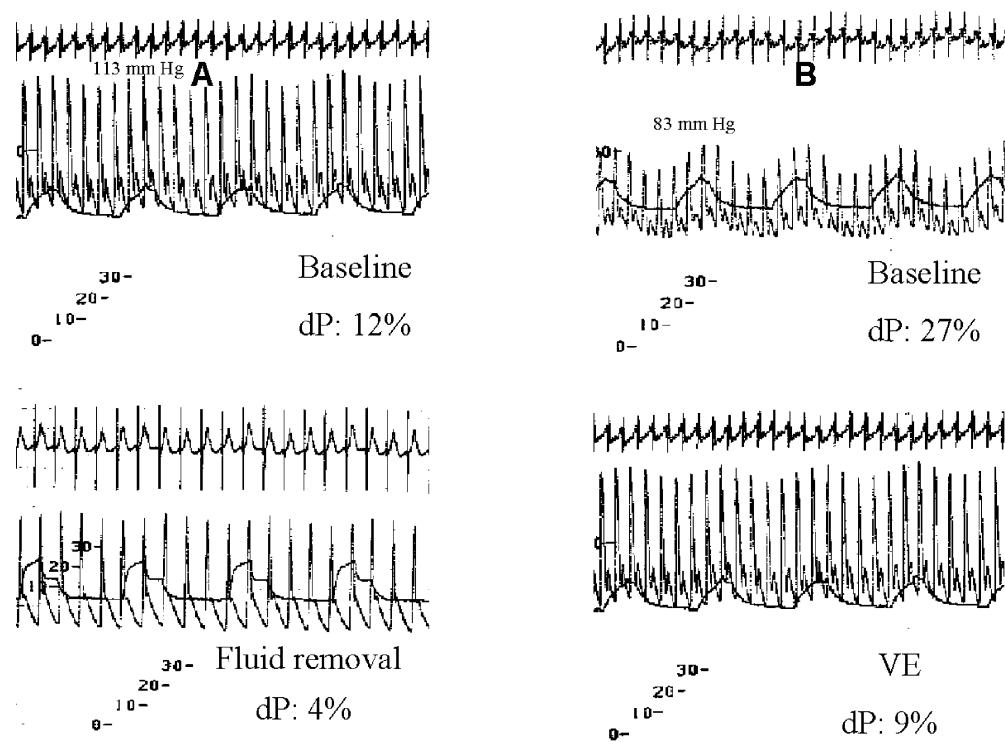
When hypovolemia is present, the right ventricle may be on the initial ascending part of its Starling curve, and sensitive to preload changes. Thus, inspiratory increases in pleural pressure will induce an additional decrease in RV preload, resulting from the transient decrease in venous return, accentuating the inspiratory drop in RV ejection [9]. This preload impairment enlarges PPV by enlarging  $\Delta$ Down (Fig. 2, upper right panel). A rapid volume expansion may reduce PPV (Fig. 2, lower right panel). Importantly, this pattern of increased PPV is usually observed in patients with low arterial pressure. In these patients, volume expansion usually significantly increases cardiac output and arterial pressure. Measurement of PPV has thus been proposed and documented to be a sensitive index of fluid responsiveness in the hemodynamically unstable patient, provided that sinus rhythm is regular and there is no spontaneous breathing

effort [8]. In a recent clinical study conducted in septic patients by Michard et al. [8], a PPV >13% detected subsequent fluid responsiveness with 94% sensitivity and 96% specificity. Additionally, hypovolemia may not be absolute, but only relative to the level of pleural pressure change [10]. Conversely, and probably more importantly, when a patient with septic shock does not exhibit marked change in arterial pulse pressure under respiratory support, fluid expansion is likely unprofitable, and perhaps deleterious.

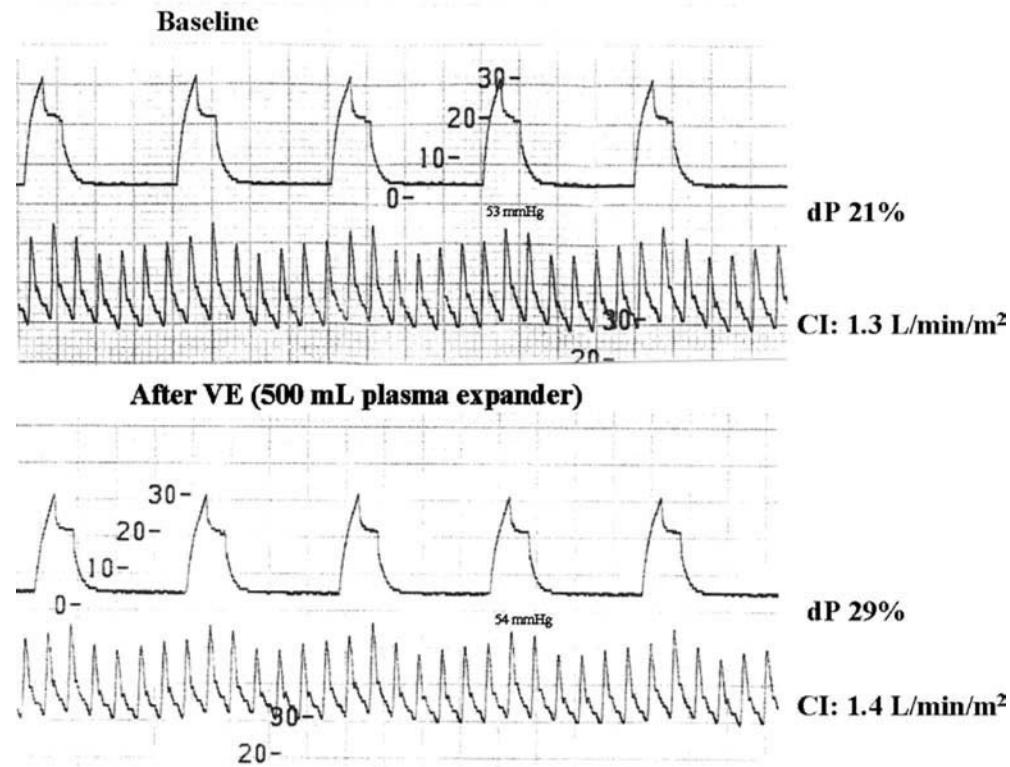
More recently, we have observed that septic patients with acute RV dysfunction may be associated with a large PPV coexisting with a low arterial pressure. Importantly, such conditions, usually referred to as cor pulmonale, may not respond to volume expansion (Fig. 3). This finding illustrates the main role of the right ventricle in cyclic changes in arterial pulse pressure during mechanical ventilation. When RV systolic function is markedly impaired and/or pulmonary vascular resistance markedly increased, volume expansion at the venous level cannot attain pulmonary circulation and cannot correct a LV preload defect [11].

Thus, cyclic changes in arterial pulse pressure and its systolic component during mechanical ventilation are induced by complex interactions between systemic venous return, RV ejection, intrathoracic blood volume

**Fig. 2** In the left panel, the overfilled patient A exhibits an expiratory drop in arterial pulse of 12% at baseline (upper panel), coexisting with a normal systolic arterial pressure. Rapid fluid removal by veno-venous hemodiafiltration reduces this expiratory drop to 4%. In the right panel, the hypovolemic patient B exhibits a major expiratory drop in arterial pulse of 27% at baseline, coexisting with an abnormally low systolic arterial pressure. Rapid volume expansion reduces this expiratory drop to 9%



**Fig. 3** Two successive recordings of arterial pulse in a mechanically ventilated patient with ARDS due to bacterial pneumonia. Transesophageal echocardiography demonstrates severe acute cor pulmonale. In the upper panel, this patient exhibits hypodynamic circulatory failure, with depressed systolic arterial pressure and Doppler cardiac output. Because this critical hemodynamic state was associated with a large 21% PPV, it was decided to apply a rapid volume expansion. After volume expansion (lower panel), the hemodynamic status was unchanged. This illustrates the key role of right ventricular function in determining the cyclic changes in arterial pulse under respiratory support. Norepinephrine infusion promptly and completely corrected circulatory failure in this patient



shifts and LV performance. Although the existence of a ΔUp usually identifies those patients with impaired LV contractility and volume expansion, and an enlarged PPV volume responsive hypovolemia, if RV function is impaired, these simple rules may not apply. Importantly, RV dysfunction often occurs in the setting of acute respiratory failure and may complicate the non-specific application of pulse pressure as a monitoring tool.

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# Lactic acidosis

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## Introduction

Hyperlactatemia is considered a hallmark of ongoing tissue hypoxia, but this is not always the case, and erroneous conclusions may sometimes be drawn that lead to unjustified therapeutic interventions. In this note we discuss the possible implications of hyperlactatemia

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## Lactate metabolism

Lactate is a byproduct of glycolysis. In the energy-producing metabolism of glucose two distinct processes occur. The first series of enzymatic reactions (Enden-Mierhoff pathway), occurring in the cytoplasm of cells, anaerobically transforms 1 molecule of glucose into 2 molecules of pyruvate, generating 2 molecules of ATP. This is the primary energy process for all cells functioning in a low oxygen environment, such as in poorly perfused tissues. Pyruvate may either be converted to lactate, producing one additional molecule of ATP, or move into the second series of reactions. The second series of enzymatic reactions (Krebs cycle) takes place in the mitochondria and requires oxygen: pyruvate is oxidized into  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  producing 18 ATP molecules. In the absence of oxygen, pyruvate cannot enter the Krebs cycle and is preferentially transformed into lactate to maintain

ATP production. This causes the lactate to pyruvate ratio to increase (normal ratio 10/1). Once molecular oxygen is again available, assuming that mitochondrial function is preserved, the excess lactate is rapidly metabolized back through pyruvate into  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  via the Krebs cycle. Some cells, such as red blood cells, do not have mitochondria and thus are primary lactate producers. Since lactate is rapidly metabolized by liver and skeletal muscle, these functional anaerobic cells result in minimal blood lactate levels.

Lactate in the blood is metabolized mainly by the liver (50%) and kidneys (20%). Liver function and liver blood flow influence hepatic lactate clearance, but extreme conditions of pH can also decrease lactate clearance. Renal lactate clearance occurs in the cortex, and this area is very sensitive to a reduction in blood flow. Striated muscle, the heart, and the brain also metabolize lactate and in some conditions this clearance can be significant. In basal metabolic conditions arterial lactate levels are between 0.5 and 1 mEq/l, and this value represents the balance between lactate production and consumption. Traditionally, elevated blood lactate levels in hemodynamically unstable subjects are often taken to reflect circulatory shock, arterial hypoxemia or both. However, other factors may coexist, complicating the interpretation of hyperlactatemia.

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## Lactate vs. pH measurements in assessing anaerobic metabolism?

Monitoring the blood pH, base deficit, or anion gap may fail to detect hyperlactatemia. Hyperventilation corrects arterial pH. Measurements of base excess and anion gap reflect lactate levels in pure lactic acidosis, buts may be influenced by other factors in complex situations. Concomitant renal failure, preexisting acid base disorders, and decreased albumin levels alter the specificity and sensitivity of base excess. Hence measurements of

blood lactate levels are mandatory to detect hyperlactatemia.

### **Lactate measurements**

Measurement has long involved sampling blood on iced fluoride tubes to inhibit in vitro red blood cells lactate production. Lactate is then measured on plasma using enzymatic colorimetry with lactate dehydrogenase. More recent analyzers use enzymatic amperometry with lactate oxidase generating H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, which is detected by the electrode. The time response with these two methods is approximately 1 h. Alternatively, blood lactate levels can be measured by a blood gas analyzer using the same enzymatic amperometry technique. The time response is only 2 min. To be valid, blood gas analyzer measurements must be made with a short delay between sampling and analysis (less than 5 min, with the syringe stored on ice). Blood lactate concentrations overestimate plasma concentrations by 1 or 2 decimals. Measurement of plasma lactate with enzymatic amperometry is the reference method, which should be used when accurate measurements are required (especially for estimating arteriovenous lactate differences). Pyruvate measurements may be useful to identify anaerobic lactate production, but these are cumbersome, time consuming, and subject to many errors.

### **Anaerobic lactate production**

In experimental conditions blood lactate concentrations rise when O<sub>2</sub> consumption becomes dependent on O<sub>2</sub> delivery (VO<sub>2</sub>/DO<sub>2</sub> dependency), reflecting anaerobic metabolism. In critically ill patients in low flow states hyperlactatemia is mostly of hypoxic origin, although some impairment in liver metabolism may coexist. Tissue wash out may also be present following acute resuscitation.

In septic conditions hyperlactatemia can also be observed, but its hypoxic origin is less clear. In patients with acute circulatory failure treated with high doses of vasoactive agents there is a strong suspicion that hyperlactatemia is related to tissue hypoxia [1]. However, tissue hypoxia and anaerobic metabolism cannot be sustained for long periods of time without inducing cell death, as the energy produced by anaerobic metabolism is quite low compared to aerobic metabolism. Mild hyperlactatemia (2–4 mEq/l) in hemodynamically stable septic patients is probably not related to tissue hypoxia.

### **Aerobic lactate production**

Experimental studies in rodents have reported that pyruvate dehydrogenase, an enzyme essential for the incorpo-

ration of pyruvate into the Krebs cycle, is inhibited after endotoxin administration or cecal ligation. However, the impact of pyruvate dehydrogenase inhibition in septic patients remains to be determined as the administration of dichloroacetate, bypassing pyruvate dehydrogenase, results in small and clinically insignificant changes in blood lactate levels and arterial pH [2].

More importantly, sepsis-induced inflammatory mediators accelerate aerobic glycolysis, increasing pyruvate availability. In hemodynamically stable septic patients Gore et al. [3] reported that lactate and pyruvate were both markedly increased and related to an accelerated glucose turnover, as glucose production was fourfold higher in septic patients than in healthy volunteers.

### **Regional lactate production**

Animal studies have reported that the lungs are major lactate producers in sepsis [4]. In patients with acute lung injury, several groups have reported that lung lactate production is markedly increased and proportional to the severity of lung injury. The amount of lactate produced by the lungs in acute lung injury is tremendous and can be higher than basal endogenous lactate production by the entire body. De Backer et al. [5] demonstrated that lung lactate production occurs in subjects with acute lung injury states but not in patients with normal lungs, cardiogenic pulmonary edema, or pneumonia. Thus lung lactate production requires a diffuse inflammatory process.

Other organs can also produce lactate. Experimental studies suggest that the gut can produce lactate in sepsis, which is likely from anaerobic metabolism as portal lactate to pyruvate ratio is increased. The investigation of splanchnic lactate turnover in humans is much more complicated as access to the portal vein is not possible outside the operating room. Since the liver is usually able to clear this small amount of gut-produced lactate, splanchnic ischemia may go unsuspected. Accordingly, De Backer et al. [6] reported that splanchnic lactate release is uncommon in patients with severe sepsis and was not related to arterial lactate concentrations, abdominal infection or signs of gut or liver dysoxia.

Finally, white blood cells may also take an active part in the increased tissue lactate production. Under basal conditions, only 10% of ATP production is of mitochondrial origin; hence anaerobic glycolysis provides most of the additional energy requirements when white blood cells are activated, producing large amounts of lactate. Although generated by anaerobic metabolism, this increase in lactate production is not due to O<sub>2</sub> deprivation. After exposure to endotoxin in vitro, whole blood lactate production almost doubles, and this is due exclusively to an increase in white blood cell lactate production [7], as red blood cell lactate production is not modified. Hence

large amounts of lactate can be produced in inflammatory processes even in the absence of tissue hypoxia. Presumably this is the cause of the positive lactate flux from the lung in acute lung injury.

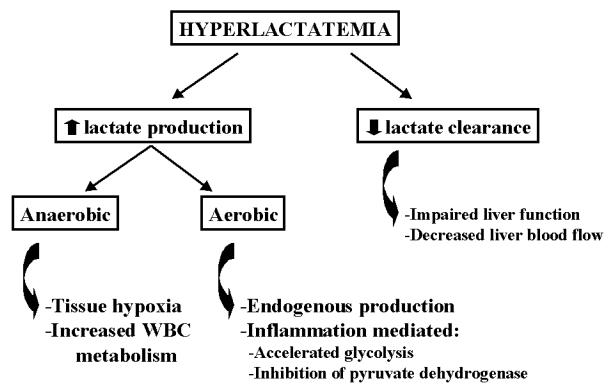
### Decreased lactate clearance

Blood lactate concentrations are the result of the balance between lactate production and clearance. In normal conditions at rest the liver accounts for more than one-half of lactate clearance, with kidneys and muscles accounting for the remaining part. The respective contribution of these organs can be influenced by several factors including exercise, liver dysfunction and glucose and O<sub>2</sub> availability.

Liver dysfunction is frequent in critically ill patients and can affect blood lactate concentrations. Using an external lactate load in hemodynamically stable septic patients, Levraut et al. [8] reported that lactate clearance was altered in patients with mildly elevated blood lactate levels (2–4 mEq/l) but not in patients with normal blood lactate concentrations. However, blood lactate concentrations are within normal values in patients with very severely impaired liver function such as in ambulatory cirrhotic patients. Hence, an increased blood lactate concentration suggests that lactate is actively, or has been recently, produced in increased amounts; the impairment in liver function being responsible for a delayed clearance.

### Interpretation of blood lactate concentrations

Increased blood lactate can only be caused by increased anaerobic or aerobic lactate production, eventually combined with decreased lactate clearance (Fig. 1). Hence tissue hypoxia should always be excluded first, as persistent tissue hypoxia can lead to multiple organ failure and death. Tissue hypoxia can be global, especially in low flow states and hypoxemia, but it can also be localized, especially within the gut microcirculation. Sometimes impaired mitochondrial performance can induce hyperlactemia. In particular, antiretroviral therapies can induce uncoupling of cytochrome energy transfer, leading to severe and often lethal lactic acidosis. Aerobic lactate production, either global or focal (especially in the lungs), is the result of activation of the inflammation cascade. Hence hyperlactatemia may be a warning indicator of a very severe inflammatory state. One should examine any patient with unexplained lactic acidosis in order to ensure that no focus of infection remains uncovered. When an altered lactate clearance is involved, it can be due to an altered liver metabolism, usually insensitive to hemodynamic manipulations, but also to a decreased perfusion of the liver, which can be improved by hemodynamic interventions.



**Fig. 1** Interpretation of hyperlactatemia. Blood lactate concentrations reflect the balance between lactate production, either anaerobic (mainly in tissue hypoxia) or aerobic, and lactate clearance (i.e., the sum of the endogenous oxidative-phosphorylation lactate production and the additional lactate production under the influence of overwhelming inflammation, and lactate clearance, mainly by the liver). WBC White blood cells

### Prognostic value

Whatever its source, lactic acidosis is associated with impaired survival. Admission blood lactate levels are strongly associated with outcome [9]. Interestingly, the prognostic value is better for lactate than for pyruvate or the lactate to pyruvate ratio, suggesting that the prognostic value is not related to tissue hypoxia alone. The course of blood lactate concentrations give the best prognostic value. A decrease in blood lactate levels during the first 24 h is associated with a better outcome while persistent hyperlactatemia and increasing lactate levels are associated with a worse outcome.

Early recognition of hyperlactatemia is essential, as early interventions targeted on hemodynamic endpoints can decrease mortality in patients with severe sepsis and elevated blood lactate levels [10]. However, it has not been confirmed that interventions targeted specifically to normalize blood lactate concentrations can improve outcome.

### Conclusions

Measurements of blood lactate concentrations are useful to detect occult tissue hypoxia and to monitor the effects of therapy. However, hyperlactatemia can be due to other causes than tissue hypoxia, in particular inflammatory processes, and therefore hemodynamic interventions in subjects with elevated blood lactate levels may not always be warranted.

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## Defining acute renal failure: physiological principles

(small peptide excretion, tubular metabolism, hormonal production) in the ICU and are not considered clinically important. There are only two physiological functions that are routinely and easily measured in the ICU, which are “unique” to the kidney and which are considered clinically important: the production of urine and the excretion of water soluble waste products of metabolism. Thus, clinicians have focused on these two aspects of renal function to help them define the presence of ARF.

### Renal solute excretion: glomerular filtration

Renal solute excretion is the result of glomerular filtration and the glomerular filtration rate (GFR) is a convenient and time-honoured way of quantifying renal function. However, GFR varies as a function of normal physiology as well as disease. For example, subjects on a vegetarian diet may have a GFR of 45–50 ml/min, while subject on a large animal protein intake may have a GFR of 140–150 ml/min, both with the same normal renal mass [3].

Baseline GFR can be incremented by efferent arteriolar vasoconstriction or afferent arteriolar vasodilatation or both. Angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors induce the opposite effect and reduce filtration fraction and GFR [4]. It is not clear what the maximum GFR value can be, but it can be approached with an acute animal protein or amino acid load. The concept of a baseline and maximal GFR in humans has been defined as the “renal functional reserve”. Figure 1 displays a series of examples describing the GFR/functional renal mass domain graph. For the purposes of this illustration, GFR can be considered a continuous function, which is maximal in subjects with 100% renal mass, absent in anephric patients and 50% in subjects with a unilateral nephrectomy.

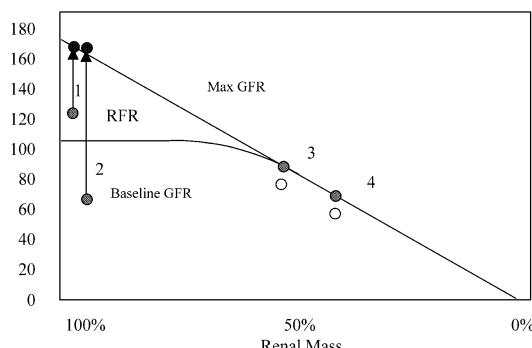
Patients 1 and 2 have the same renal mass but different baseline GFRs owing to different basal protein in-

### Introduction

Definitions are never “right” or “wrong”. They are simply more or less “useful” for a given purpose. The same is true of the clinical syndrome of acute renal failure (ARF), which is common in the ICU [1, 2]. In many ways, its nature and epidemiology resemble those of other loosely defined ICU syndromes, such as sepsis or ARDS. In this physiological note, however, we wish to focus on how our understanding of renal physiology can be used to guide the definition of ARF.

### What are the physiological functions of the kidney?

Many renal functions are shared with other organs (acid-base control with lung; blood pressure control via the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone axis with liver, lung and adrenal glands). Other functions are not routinely measured



**Fig. 1**

takes levels. Subject 1 has a GFR of 120 ml/min that can be stimulated to 170 ml/min [3, 4, 5, 6]. Patient 2 is a vegetarian and has a baseline GFR of 65 ml/min that also can be stimulated to 170 ml/min. In other words, the renal functional reserve in these two patients is different because they are using their GFR capacity at a different level. Patient 3 has undergone a unilateral nephrectomy. His baseline GFR corresponds to his maximal GFR under unrestricted dietary conditions. If a moderate protein restriction is applied to his diet, his baseline GFR may decrease and some degree of renal functional reserve become evident. The same concept is true for patient 4; however, to restore some functional reserve, severe protein restriction is needed. Thus, *baseline GFR does not necessarily correspond to the extent of functioning renal mass* and even very careful measurements of GFR will not allow us to define renal function without placing it in the context of maximal capacity. In this regard GFR is not unlike a resting ECG for the kidney. When it is grossly abnormal, renal function is impaired, but when it is normal, a stress test is required. Another approach, is to compare measurements taken over time. Serial measurements of GFR may be impractical but surrogates are readily available. Because urea, or blood urea nitrogen (BUN), is such a non-specific indicator of renal function [7] it is a very poor surrogate for GFR and will not be discussed further.

### Serum creatinine, its physiology and defining acute renal failure

Creatinine is much more specific at assessing renal function than BUN, but it only loosely corresponds to GFR. For example, a serum creatinine ( $S_{cr}$ ) of 1.5 mg/dl (133 mol/l) at steady-state, corresponds to a GFR of about 36 ml/min in an 80-year-old white female, but of about 77 ml/min in a 20-year-old black male. Similarly, a serum creatinine of 3.0 mg/dl (265 mol/l) in a patient suspected of having renal impairment would reflect a GFR of 16 ml/min in the elderly female but 35 ml/min in

the young male. In both cases, a doubling of serum creatinine corresponds to an approximate decrease in GFR of 50% (exactly a 55% decrease in the above example) because there is a linear relationship between GFR and  $1/Scr$ . Thus, while every classification of ARF in the literature relies on some threshold value for serum creatinine concentration, *no single creatinine value corresponds to a given GFR across all patients*. Therefore, it is *the change in creatinine* that is clinically and physiologically useful in determining the presence of ARF.

Unfortunately, like all estimates of GFR (including creatinine clearance), the  $S_{cr}$  is not an accurate reflection of GFR in the non-steady state condition of ARF. During the evolution of dysfunction,  $S_{cr}$  will *underestimate* the degree of dysfunction. Nonetheless, the degree to which  $S_{cr}$  changes from baseline (and perhaps the rate of change as well) will reflect the change in GFR.  $S_{cr}$  is easily measured and it is reasonably specific for renal function. Thus,  $S_{cr}$  is a reasonable approximation of GFR in most patients with normal renal function [8]. Creatinine is formed from non-enzymatic dehydration of creatine in the liver and 98% of the creatine pool is in muscle. Critically ill patients may have abnormalities in liver function and markedly decreased muscle mass. Additional factors influencing creatinine production include conditions of increased production such as trauma, fever and immobilisation; and conditions of decreased production including liver disease, decreased muscle mass and ageing. In addition, tubular re-absorption ("back-leak") may occur in conditions associated with low urine flow rate. Finally, the volume of distribution ( $V_D$ ) for creatinine (total body water) influences  $S_{cr}$  and may be dramatically increased in critically ill patients and, in the short term, its concentration in plasma can be dramatically altered by rapid plasma volume expansion. There is currently no information on extra-renal creatinine clearance in ARF and a non-steady state condition often exists [9].

### Creatinine clearance

Once GFR has reached a steady state it can be quantified by measuring a 24-h creatinine clearance. Unfortunately, the accuracy of a creatinine clearance (even when collection is complete) is limited because as GFR falls, creatinine secretion is increased, and thus the rise in  $S_{cr}$  is less [10, 11]. Accordingly, creatinine excretion is much greater than the filtered load, causing overestimation of the GFR [11]. Therefore creatinine clearance represents the upper limit of true GFR. A more accurate determination of GFR would require measurement of the clearance of inulin or radio-labelled compounds [12]. Unfortunately, these tests are not routinely available. However, for clinical purposes, *determining the exact GFR is rarely necessary*. Instead, it is important to determine whether

renal function is stable or getting worse or better. This can usually be determined by monitoring  $S_{cr}$  alone [8].

## Other markers of renal failure

### Urine output

Urine output is the commonly measured parameter of renal function in the ICU and is more sensitive to changes in renal haemodynamics than biochemical markers of solute clearance. However, it is far less specific—except when severely reduced or absent. Severe ARF can exist despite normal urine output (i.e. non-oliguric ARF) but changes in urine output often occur long before biochemical changes are apparent. Since non-oliguric ARF has a lower mortality rate than oliguric ARF, urine output is used to differentiate ARF conditions. Classically, oliguria is defined (approximately) as urine output less than 5 ml/kg per day or 0.5 ml/kg per h. It would be highly desirable to have markers which allow physicians to diagnose when oliguria is a true early marker of developing renal failure, because this would allow the identification of patients in whom early intervention may be justified.

### Other markers

Kidney injury molecule-1 (KIM-1) expression is markedly up-regulated in the proximal tubule in the post-ischemic rat kidney [13]. A soluble form of human KIM-1 can be detected in the urine of patients with ARF and may serve as a useful biomarker for renal proximal tubule injury, possibly facilitating the early diagnosis of the disease and serving to discriminate between different forms of renal dysfunction [13].

Another marker of potential importance is cystatin C (cysC). Cys C is a cysteine proteinase inhibitor of low molecular weight that is produced constantly by nucleated cells (apparently independently of pathological states) and is excreted by the glomerulus, thus closely reflecting GFR. Thus, cysC may be a better marker of GFR than

creatinine [14]. Unfortunately, little information exists on the usefulness of cysC in ARF. A recent pilot study suggested that it might be superior to both  $S_{cr}$  and the “modification of diet in renal disease” (MDRD) equation in the detection of ARF [15].

## Defining acute renal failure when baseline renal function is unknown

One option is to calculate a theoretical baseline serum creatinine value for a given patient assuming a normal GFR of approximately  $95 \pm 20$  ml/min in women and  $120 \pm 25$  ml/min in men [10]. A normal GFR of approximately  $75 - 100$  ml/min per  $1.73\text{ m}^2$  can be assumed by normalising the GFR to body surface area [16] and, thus, a change from baseline can be estimated for a given patient. The simplified MDRD formula provides a robust estimate of GFR relative to serum creatinine based on age, race and sex [17]. This estimate could then be used to calculate the relative change in GFR in a given patient. The application of the MDRD equation to estimate baseline creatinine requires a simple table with age, race and gender. Table 1 solves the MDRD equation for the lower end of the normal range (i.e. 75 ml/min per  $1.73\text{ m}^2$ ). Note, the MDRD formula is used only to estimate the baseline when it is not known. For example, a 50-year-old black female would be expected to have a baseline creatinine of 1.0 mg/dl (88  $\mu\text{mol/l}$ ). This approach may misclassify some patients, but is probably adequate for population studies.

## Defining acute renal failure in the setting of known renal dysfunction

If the patient has pre-existing renal disease, the baseline GFR and  $S_{cr}$  will be different from those predicted by the MDRD equation. Also, the relative decrease in renal function required to reach a given level of  $S_{cr}$  will be less than that of a patient without pre-existing disease. For example, a patient with a  $S_{cr}$  of 1 mg/dl (88  $\mu\text{mol/l}$ ) will have a steady-state  $S_{cr}$  of 3 mg/dl (264  $\mu\text{mol/l}$ ) when

**Table 1** Estimated baseline creatinine

Age (years)	Black males (mg/dl   $\mu\text{mol/l}$ )	White males (mg/dl   $\mu\text{mol/l}$ )	Black females (mg/dl   $\mu\text{mol/l}$ )	White females (mg/dl   $\mu\text{mol/l}$ )
20–24	1.5   133	1.3   115	1.2   106	1.0   88
25–29	1.5   133	1.2   106	1.1   97	1.0   88
30–39	1.4   124	1.2   106	1.1   97	0.9   80
40–54	1.3   115	1.1   97	1.0   88	0.9   80
55–65	1.3   115	1.1   97	1.0   88	0.8   71
>65	1.2   106	1.0   88	0.9   80	0.8   71

$$\text{Estimated glomerular filtration rate (GFR)} = 75 \text{ (ml/min per } 1.73 \text{ m}^2) = 186x \text{ (Scr)} - 1.154x \text{ (age)} \\ 0.203x(0.742 \text{ if female}) \times (1.210 \text{ if African-American}) = \exp(5.228 - 1.154x \ln(\text{Scr}) - 0.203x \ln(\text{age}) \\ (0.299 \text{ if female}) + (0.192 \text{ if African-American}))$$

75% of GFR is lost. By contrast, when only 50% of GFR is lost in a perfectly matched patient for age, race and sex with a baseline  $S_{cr}$  of 2.5 mg/dl (221 mol/l), the  $S_{cr}$  will be 5 mg/dl (442 mol/l). These  $S_{cr}$  change criteria fail to convey accurately the degree of loss of renal function and the severity of injury. Thus, separate criteria should be used for the diagnosis of ARF superimposed on chronic renal disease. One possible approach would be to use a relative change in  $S_{cr}$  (e.g. threefold) as the primary criterion for ARF, with an absolute cut-off (e.g. 4 mg/dl or about 350 mol/l) as a secondary criterion, when baseline  $S_{cr}$  is abnormal. For example, an acute rise in  $S_{cr}$  (of at least 0.5 mg/dl or 44 mol/l) to more than 4 mg/dl (350 mol/l) will serve to identify most patients with ARF when their baseline  $S_{cr}$  is abnormal.

### Testing a definition of acute renal failure?

The ultimate value of a definition for ARF is determined by its utility. A classification scheme for ARF should be sensitive and specific and also predictive of relevant clinical outcomes such as mortality, use of dialysis and length of hospital stay. These are testable hypotheses despite the lack of renal specificity for such end points [18].

It is also understood that therapy can influence the primary criteria for the diagnosis of ARF. For example, volume status will influence urine output and even, to some degree,  $S_{cr}$ , by altering  $V_D$ . Large-dose diuretics may be used to force a urine output when it would otherwise fall into a category consistent with a diagnosis of ARF. Ulti-

mately, these cases will generally fall into defined criteria but they may cause confusion in the early acute situation. In the end, for operative purposes, it must be assumed that patients are adequately hydrated, not treated with diuretics except in the case of volume overload and treated with renal replacement therapy when clinically indicated. Although this may not always be true for individuals, it should be broadly true for populations.

### Conclusions

There are no perfect ways to measure renal function. Even very precise measures of GFR will fail to distinguish mild to moderate functional loss from normal function. Renal function reserve is important but cumbersome to measure. Surrogate measures such as serum creatinine, while routinely available at the bedside, show limited correlation to GFR, especially in the setting of critical illness. Injury markers are being developed which might aid us in the future but are not ready for use just yet. Nonetheless, the lessons of physiology can be used to guide the development of definitions for ARF. All the above physiological considerations have played an important role in guiding the members of the Acute Dialysis Quality Initiative (ADQI) [19] in the formulation of a consensus set of criteria to define ARF. These criteria are open for discussion and comments can be submitted to the ADQI website (<http://www.ADQI.net>). We believe this process to be fundamental to improving our care of ARF patients and hope to move to formal testing of a final set of criteria soon.

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Frédérique Schortgen

## Hypotension during intermittent hemodialysis: new insights into an old problem

### Introduction

The main indication for renal replacement therapy in critically ill patients is ischemic acute tubular necrosis associated with multiple organ failure requiring mechanical ventilation and catecholamine administration. The kind of renal replacement therapy offering the best hemodynamic tolerance remains debated. Intermittent hemodialysis (IHD) is often viewed by many ICU physicians as inducing hemodynamic instability. The application of recent concepts regarding hemodialysis modalities is able to solve part of this old problem [1]. A major problem with IHD is the direct application of chronic hemodialysis concepts in the management of acute renal failure. This approach is responsible for much of the observed hemodynamic instability and can be minimized by thoughtful planning prior to IHD in the critically ill patient.

### What are the mechanisms of hypotension during hemodialysis?

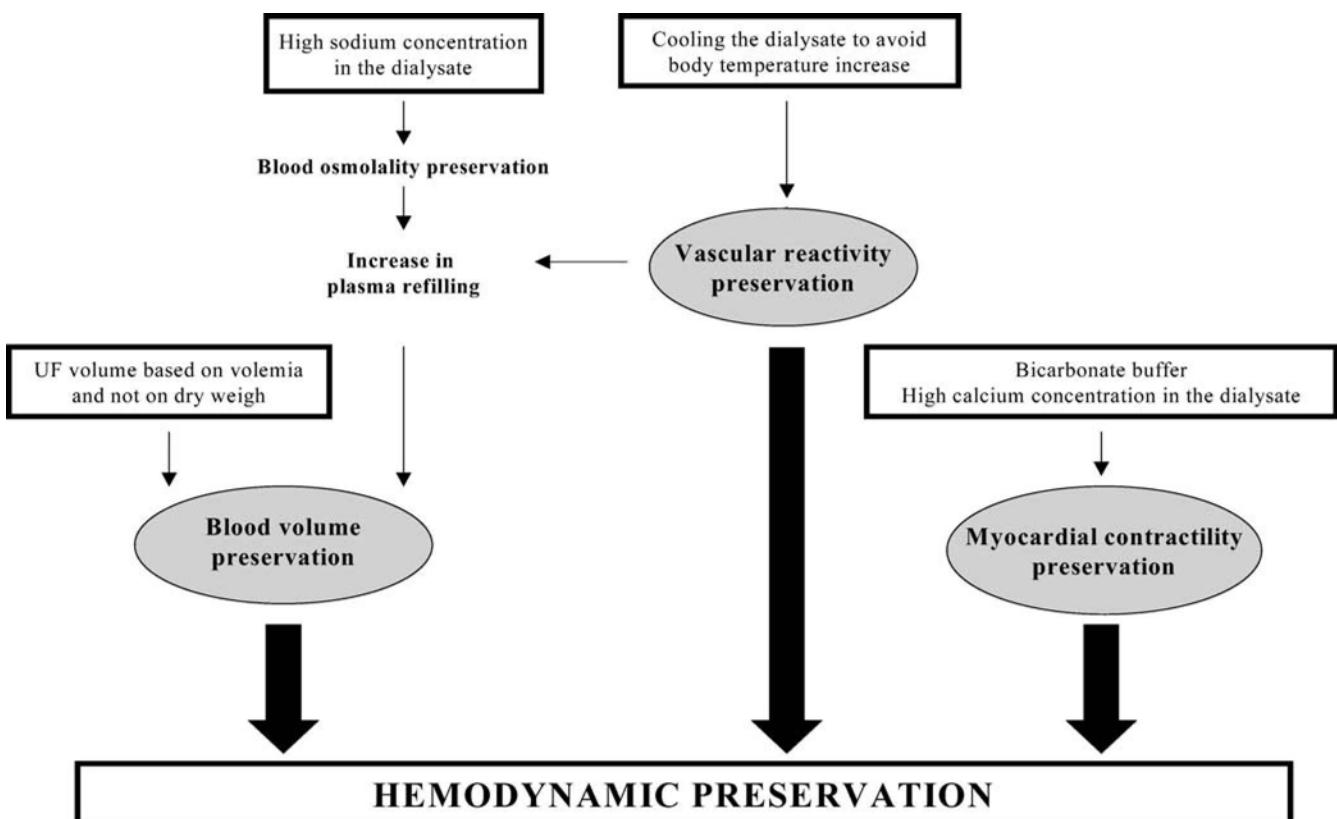
In critically ill patients intradialytic hypotension results from the underlying process and is exacerbated by the

technique itself. Systemic blood pressure is determined by the interaction of blood flow and peripheral vasomotor tone, both of which may be altered by critical illness and hemodialysis. Vasomotor tone is the complex result of interactions between autonomic tone, metabolic demand, blood flow distribution, and the responsiveness of the vascular smooth muscle to vasoactive stimuli, such as ionized calcium, mediators of sepsis, and their vasoactive by-products (e.g., prostaglandin F<sub>2α</sub>, prostacyclin). Blood flow, on the other hand, is the result of another complex interaction between the determinants of both venous return and ventricular pump function. Importantly, venous return is determined by the pressure gradient from the periphery to the heart, such that either loss of circulating blood volume (hypovolemia) or loss of vasomotor tone (functional hypovolemia) decreases venous return. The main pathogenesis of intradialytic hypotension is a decrease in absolute or relative blood volume. Adaptation to this hypovolemic state includes fluid shift from the extra- to the intravascular space and increases in vascular resistance and myocardial contractility (Fig. 1). Although changes in cardiac contractility may also occur, these appear to less important. Hemodialysis settings have a direct impact on these adaptive mechanisms, and hemodynamic stability requires hemodialysis procedures to be optimized to facilitate plasma refilling and cardiovascular reactivity.

### How to preserve blood volume?

#### Role of ultrafiltration

The volume of ultrafiltration ordered must be based on the patient's intravascular volume status (volemia) and not on the patient's dry weight. In contrast to chronic hemodialysis, where patients are always hypervolemic before starting IHD session, hypervolemia is rarely present in critically ill patients, except in the case of congestive



**Fig. 1** Main mechanisms of hemodynamic stability during intermittent hemodialysis

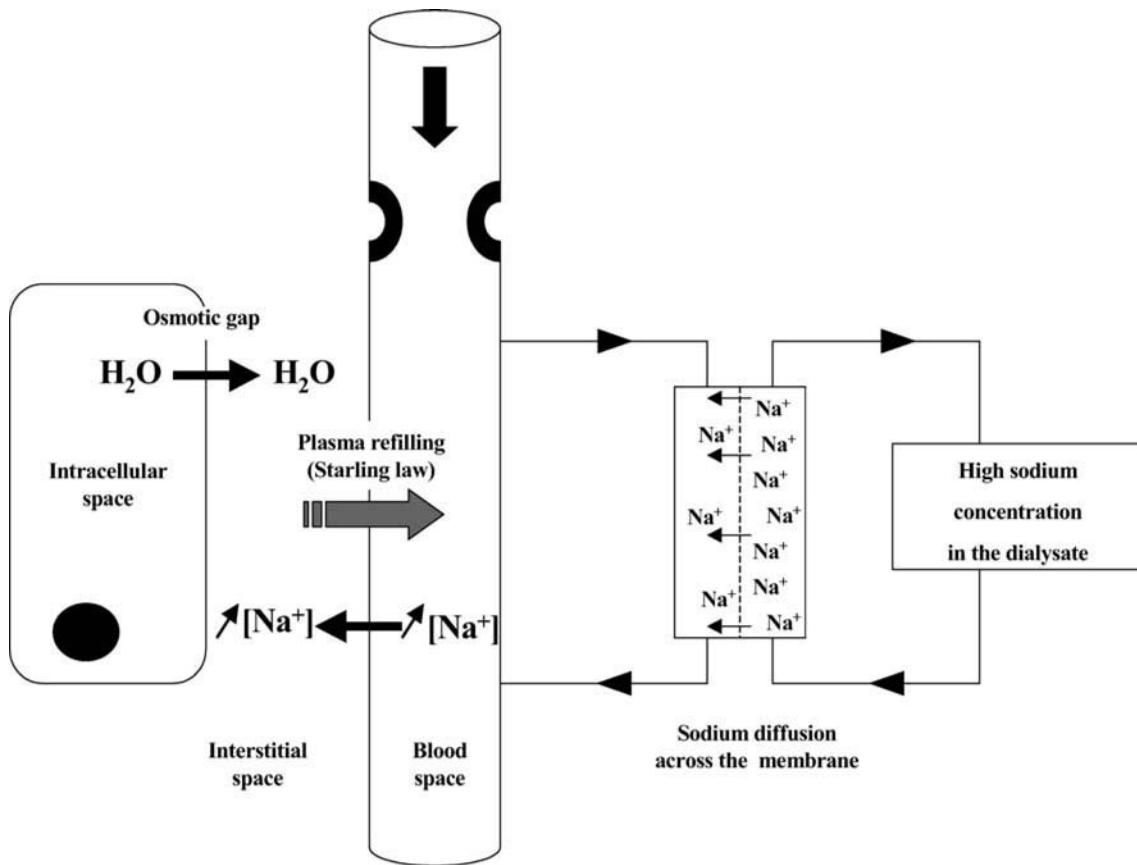
heart failure. Patients needing renal replacement therapy in the ICU are typically treated in the context of septic shock complicated by oliguric acute tubular necrosis despite aggressive fluid loading and administration of vasoactive drugs. They often present interstitial edemas with a positive weight gain, whereas their plasma volume may not be yet fully restored, and vasopressor perfusions are still needed. During the acute phase of sepsis or hypovolemic shock the indication for ultrafiltration must be addressed cautiously. Fluid removal may be beneficial only in the case of acute respiratory distress syndrome with severe hypoxemia, where the removal of extravascular lung water is expected to improve oxygenation [1].

At the beginning of the hemodialysis session intravascular blood volume decreases due to ultrafiltration but usually remains stable thereafter despite continuous fluid removal because of the plasma refilling process (Fig. 2). Intravascular space filling comes at first from interstitial and then from intracellular fluids. The use of high ultrafiltration rates, approx. 1 l/h, promotes a high incidence of intradialytic hypotensions in critically ill patients [2]. Because plasma refilling is time dependent, a high rate of blood volume decrease must be avoided in the nonhy-

pervolemic patient. To provide clinically effect dialysis and, if indicated, fluid removal without inducing hypotension, patients with acute renal failure require a longer hemodialysis run than that required for chronic IHD. Thus to receive an adequate dialysis dose, patients suffering from acute renal failure need prolonged (>4 to 6 h) or iterative (daily or every other day) IHD sessions, which allows the ultrafiltration rate per hour to be reduced [1, 2].

#### Role of osmolality

During hemodialysis solute removal is achieved by diffusion according to concentrations gradient across the membrane. Solute movements are independent of solvent shift and may occur in either direction between blood and dialysate depending on the respective solute concentrations in the dialysate and the blood. This dissociation between solute and solvent shifts may be responsible for changes in blood osmolality during the session. Removal of sodium, which represents the main osmotic agent during hemodialysis, decreases osmolality. Decrease in blood osmolality during IHD has been shown to be a risk factor for hemodynamic worsening [3]. Indeed, fall in plasma osmolality promotes water displacement into the cells and impedes plasma refilling (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Principle of plasma refilling during intermittent hemodialysis

Increasing sodium concentration in the dialysate above the plasma concentration permits sodium shift from the dialysate to the patient's blood. Increase in plasma and interstitial osmolality facilitates adequate fluid movements for plasma refilling (i.e., from intracellular to vascular space through the interstitium; Fig. 2). In comparison to the usual sodium concentration used in chronic hemodialysis patients (i.e., 138–140 mmol/l), the use of high concentration of sodium in the dialysate, 145–150 mmol/l, limits blood volume reduction despite a higher volume of ultrafiltration and reduces the incidence of hypotensions needing therapeutic intervention [1, 4]. In the absence of ultrafiltration the use of a high concentration of sodium in the dialysate is useful to increase blood volume, similarly to the use of hypertonic saline perfusion.

### How to preserve vascular reactivity?

Improving adaptation of peripheral vascular resistances to volume depletion may reduce the risk of intradialytic hypotension. According to the Starling law, precapillary

vasoconstriction can decrease intravascular hydrostatic pressure and facilitate plasma refilling. The main initiating factor for vasodilatation during IHD session is the increase in body temperature.

### Role of thermal balance

An increase in core temperature is observed during a standard hemodialysis session (dialysate temperature 37°–37.5°C), which is associated with vasodilatation and impairment of vascular response to the decrease in blood volume. In chronic hemodialysis patients cardiovascular tolerance to IHD is improved when the dialysate temperature is adjusted to the range of 35°–35.5°C [5]. More important than the absolute dialysate temperature, a better hemodynamic tolerance is achieved if the dialysate temperature setting prevents any increase in core temperature and heat accumulation in the body [6]. To maintain the body temperature unchanged in chronic hemodialysis patient the dialysate temperature must be set 1°–2°C below the baseline body temperature recorded before connection. The level of the dialysate temperature setting avoiding increase in body temperature, however, has not been specifically studied in patients with acute renal failure.

## Place of isolated ultrafiltration

That a better adaptation of peripheral vascular resistances exists during ultrafiltration alone (i.e., fluid removal without concomitant diffusive movements) was observed more than 20 years ago. The precise mechanism was unknown until recent studies showing that during isolated ultrafiltration the body temperature can easily decrease because the circulation of the dialysate is stopped in the membrane. Body temperature changes then depend on room temperature, which is lower than dialysate temperature. Ultrafiltration alone results in the same hemodynamic stability than hemodialysis with a dialysate temperature set to obtain the same decrease in body temperature [7]. Convective techniques (hemofiltration and hemodiafiltration) may have a better thermal effect explaining their better hemodynamic tolerance. Large amounts of replacement fluid may induce a larger decrease in body temperature than during IHD. In chronic dialysis patients van der Sande and colleagues [8] manipulated the dialysate temperature during IHD and the amount of replacement fluid infused at room temperature during hemodiafiltration to obtain the same thermal effect on patient body temperature. They found that hemodiafiltration had no advantage in preventing hemodynamic instability in comparison to IHD, when the body temperature decreased to the same degree with the two techniques.

## How to preserve cardiac contractility?

### Role of buffer solutions

Acetate hemodialysis promotes a large decrease in cardiac output in comparison to bicarbonate [9]. A direct negative impact of acetate on myocardial contrac-

tility has been suggested. Acetate has been also incriminated in promoting vasodilatation; this adverse effect remains uncertain because of discrepancies between studies.

### Role of calcium

Variations in ionized calcium related to hemodialysis may have an impact on myocardial contractility. A low calcium concentration in the dialysate has been shown to be associated with calcium removal, decrease in serum ionized calcium concentration, and hemodynamic instability, particularly in patients suffering from cardiac failure [10]. In contrast to chronic hemodialysis in which the concentration of calcium is often low in the dialysate (e.g., high doses of oral calcium-based phosphate binder, hypercalcemia related to hyperparathyroidism), in critically ill patients the calcium concentration must be rather high (at least 1.75 mmol/l).

## Conclusion

In critically ill patients the IHD settings may differ from those in chronic hemodialysis patients, in whom the main objective is the largest weight loss within the minimal session time. When IHD is the technique of renal replacement therapy used in critically ill patients, adequate settings must be used to avoid excessive blood volume loss, vasodilatation, and myocardial depression. Improving hemodynamic tolerance of IHD must be our primary goal to facilitate adequate dialysis dose delivery and organ failure recovery, avoiding shortened session time because of hypotension.

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## Intracranial pressure

### Part one: Historical overview and basic concepts

pressure (ICP), was widely used (Ayer 1929, Merrit and Fremont-Smith 1937, Browder and Meyer 1938, Cairns 1939, Landon 1917, Sharpe 1920 and Jackson 1922) and this was the earliest clinical method of ICP measurement.

Jackson pointed out the neglect by surgeons of the field of acute traumatic brain injuries. He demonstrated that the pulse, respiration and blood pressure are affected only once the medulla is compressed and stated that to wait for these changes as an indication for operation on the cerebrum in acute cerebral injury is to court disaster.

Furthermore, reports emerged that some patients, even if showing clinical signs of brain compression, had normal lumbar CSF pressures or died after the procedure. Lumbar puncture fell into disuse for the diagnosis of intracranial hypertension due to the possibility of inducing brain-stem compression through tentorial or tonsillar herniation, and because, if the system does not communicate, the spinal fluid pressure is not an accurate reflection of ICP as demonstrated by Langfitt's work [1].

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### Introduction

One hundred and seventy years ago, Magendie (1783–1855) discovered a small foramen in the floor of the fourth ventricle, now bearing his name, and pointed out the connection between the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the ventricular system and in the subarachnoid spaces of the brain and cord. By this momentous discovery, he led the way to understanding the circulation of CSF and to problems associated with increased CSF pressure.

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### Lumbar cerebral spinal fluid pressure measurement

Physiological exploration of human CSF started in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1891, Quincke published his studies on the diagnostic and therapeutic applications of lumbar puncture. He standardised the technique and made it a rule always to measure the pressure of the CSF by connecting the lumbar puncture needle with a fine glass pipette in which the fluid was allowed to rise.

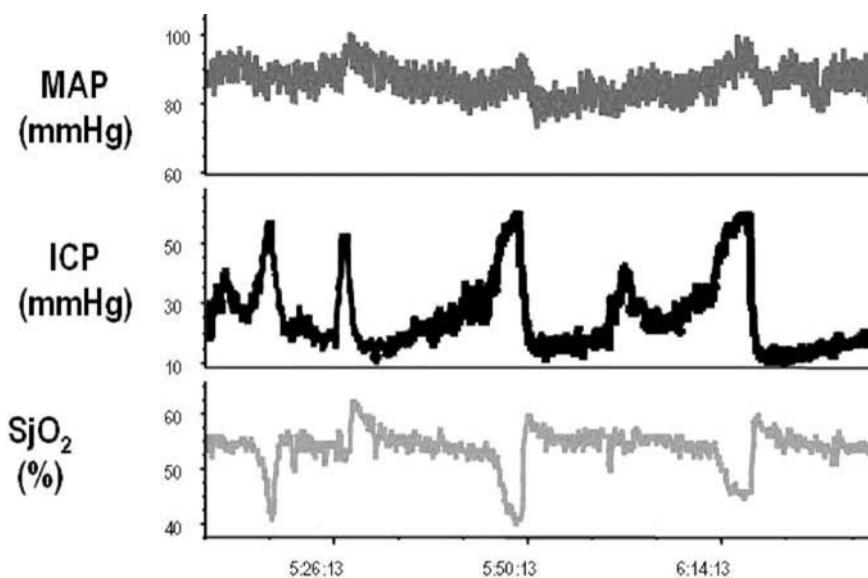
Subsequently, repeated measurement of lumbar cerebral spinal fluid pressure, as an assessment of intracranial

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### Lundberg: a clinical pioneer

Researchers moved from the lumbar approach to direct cannulation of the ventricular system. Early clinical research in this field was reported by Nils Lundberg and involved conscious volunteers with a multiplicity of intracranial pathologies [2]. They were monitored by a fluid-filled transducer system attached to a ventricular catheter placed in the lateral ventricle. Recordings lasted, in some cases, several hours or days. Lundberg, enlightened by his clinical talent, reported a number of phenomena that are relevant today. However, a recording system connected to an analogue output from the ICP transducer is required for detection and this is frequently overlooked in modern ICU monitoring systems. A digital trend does not usually have sufficient resolution to detect ICP waves with a frequency of less than 2/min. The clinical importance of ventricular fluid pressure (VFP) waveform was

**Fig. 1** Example of plateau waves recorded at bedside. The plateau waves are a haemodynamic phenomenon associated with cerebrovascular vasodilation. They are observed in patients with preserved cerebral autoregulation but reduced pressure-volume compensatory reserve. As documented by the tracing, during plateau waves, cerebral perfusion pressure falls below the ischaemic threshold, shown by jugular saturation oximetry. MAP mean arterial pressure, ICP intracranial pressure,  $SjO_2$  continuous jugular saturation



elucidated in 48 patients and it was concluded that the spontaneous changes in VFP curve were of two main types, plateau waves and rhythmic oscillations[3]. Lundberg stated that the former could cause both transient and persistent damage to the brain and therefore diagnosis, utilising a ventricular catheter, and prevention of such pressure variations were of clinical importance. The rhythmic fluctuations in VFP at the frequency of 1/min can be normal but their incidence increases with pathology and then may represent cerebral dysfunction. This may also be true for the rhythmic waves with a frequency of 6/min. The waves described by Lundberg were:

- *A waves* or “Plateau waves” have amplitudes of 50–100 mmHg, lasting 5–20 min. These waves are always associated with intracranial pathology (Fig. 1). During such waves, it is common to observe evidence of early herniation, including bradycardia and hypertension. The aetiology is uncertain, but it is postulated that as cerebral perfusion pressure (i.e. the difference between mean arterial pressure and intracranial pressure, CPP) becomes inadequate to meet metabolic demand, cerebral vasodilatation ensues and cerebral blood volume increases. This leads to a vicious circle, with further CPP decrease, predisposing the patient to other plateau waves and, if low CPP is not corrected, to ruinous effects.
- *B waves* are oscillating and up to 50 mmHg in amplitude with a frequency 0.5–2/min and are thought to be due to vasomotor centre instability when CPP is unstable or at the lower limits of pressure autoregulation.
- *C waves* are oscillating and up to 20 mmHg in amplitude and have a frequency of 4–8/min. These waves have been documented in healthy individuals and are

thought to occur because of interaction between cardiac and respiratory cycles.

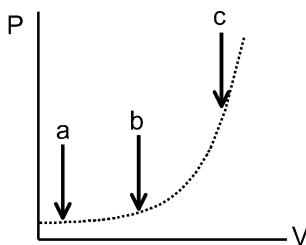
Both A and B waves require intervention to reduce ICP and preserve CPP. Without the continuous recording of ICP, judgement of correct timing and evaluation of the efficacy of the therapy will be difficult.

### Monro and Kellie doctrine

The fundamental principles of raised intracranial pressure were developed in Scotland and are condensed in the doctrine credited to Professors Monro (1783) [4] and Kellie (1824) [5], which states, once the fontanelles and sutures are closed, that:

- The brain is enclosed in a non-expandable case of bone;
- The brain parenchyma is nearly incompressible;
- The volume of the blood in the cranial cavity is therefore nearly constant and
- A continuous outflow of venous blood from the cranial cavity is required to make room for continuous incoming arterial blood.

The importance of these observations is that the skull cannot easily accommodate any additional volume. The craniospinal axis is essentially a partially closed box with container properties including both viscous and elastic elements. The elastic or, its inverse, the compliant properties of the container will determine what added volume can be absorbed before intracranial pressure begins to rise. In its original form the Monro-Kellie doctrine did not take into account the CSF as a component of the cranial



**Fig. 2** Pressure-volume curve of the craniospinal compartment. This figure illustrates the principle that in the physiological range, i.e. near the origin of the x-axis on the graph (*point a*), intracranial pressure remains normal in spite of small additions of volume until a point of decompensation (*point b*), after which each subsequent increment in total volume results in an ever larger increment in intracranial pressure (*point c*)

compartment. The concept of reciprocal volume changes between blood and CSF was introduced in 1846 by Burrows and, later, extended in the early twentieth century by Weed to allow for reciprocal changes in all the craniospinal constituents.

An understanding of raised ICP encompasses an analysis of both intracranial volume and craniospinal compliance. Therefore, ICP is a reflection of the relationship between alterations in craniospinal volume and the ability of the craniospinal axis to accommodate added volume (Fig. 2).

If a new intracranial volume displaces venous blood and CSF, for example haematoma, tumour, oedema or hydrocephalus, initially there is little change in ICP. However, the ability to accept the cerebral blood flow component of the cardiac cycle is decreased and, provided the volume of each cerebral component of the cardiac cycle remains constant, close observation will recognise an increase in the ICP wave amplitude [6]. This is because intracranial compliance is reduced. Further exhaustion of the volumetric compensatory reserve leads to an increase in mean ICP and a further increase in ICP wave amplitude. At very high ICP the amplitude of the ICP wave decreases as cerebral blood flow (CBF) is reduced by a reduction in compliance and perfusion pressure. Avezaat and Van Eijdhoven were some of the original researchers to study the changing shape of the ICP wave as the patient moves along the volume-pressure curve. They developed a model showing that the ICP pulse amplitude ( $\Delta P$ ) was linearly proportional to the ICP and the elastic coefficient (E1). They used this method roughly to estimate the intracranial compliance of the patient.

### Intracranial compliance

Intracranial compliance is the change in volume ( $\Delta V$ ) per unit change in pressure ( $\Delta P$ ). Compliance is the inverse of elastance ( $\Delta P/\Delta V$ ), sometimes known as the volume-pressure response (VPR).

$$\text{Compliance}(C = \Delta V / \Delta P) = 1 / \text{Elastance} = 1 / \text{VPR}$$

Marmarou, interested in CSF dynamics, was the first to provide a full mathematical description of the craniospinal volume-pressure relationship. He developed a mathematical model of the CSF system which produced a general solution for the CSF pressure. The model parameters were subsequently verified experimentally in an animal model of hydrocephalus. As a corollary of this study, Marmarou demonstrated that the non-linear craniospinal volume-pressure relationship could be described as a straight line segment relating the logarithm of pressure to volume, which implies a mono-exponential relationship between volume and pressure. Marmarou termed the slope of this relationship the pressure-volume index (PVI), which is the notional volume required to raise ICP tenfold. PVI is expressed by the formula:

$$\text{PVI} = \Delta V / (\log_{10} P_o / P_m)$$

Where  $\Delta V$  expresses the volume, in millilitres, added or withdrawn from the ventricular system,  $P_o$  is the initial pressure and  $P_m$  the final pressure.

Unlike elastance or its inverse, compliance, the PVI characterises the craniospinal volume-pressure relationship over the whole physiological range of ICP. The PVI is calculated from the pressure change resulting from a rapid injection or withdrawal of fluid from the CSF space and was utilised both clinically and experimentally as a measure of summed craniospinal compliance. In the clinical setting, PVI measures are obtained by first removing 2 ml and recording the reduction in pressure [7]. By this technique, the PVI can be estimated and, after deciding upon a peak pressure that should not be exceeded, a maximum volume injection can be calculated. Ordinarily, the PVI measures are obtained by repeated withdrawal and injections of 2 ml and the average PVI is calculated from multiple injections. Injection of fluid into the CSF space is not performed when ICP is high. In those cases, PVI is obtained only from withdrawal of known quantities of fluid.

However, the use of the PVI method is not without disadvantages:

- Variability exists between measurements due to the difficulty in manually injecting consistent volumes of fluid at a constant rate. As a result an average of repeated measures is usually required.
- There is an increased risk of infection with this technique. Aetiologies include: manipulation of the CSF access system to test the PVI, CSF sampling and recalibration of the pressure transducer, all of which potentially expose the patient to a higher risk of infection.
- Moreover, the procedure is time consuming and requires highly trained personnel.

As a consequence of these limitations, the PVI tests are not routinely used in the clinical situation.

## Conclusion

Intracranial pressure is a reflection of the relationship between alterations in craniospinal volume and the ability

of the craniospinal axis to accommodate added volume. It can not be estimated without directly measuring it. In 1972, Mario Brock realised the interest in ICP monitoring and organised the first International Symposium on Intracranial Pressure in Hanover. This was the start of a very successful series of meetings and continues in Hong Kong this year, as ICP XII.

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## Intracranial pressure

### Part two: Clinical applications and technology

paired after acute injury and, importantly, the lower limit for pressure autoregulation may be increased markedly. When intracranial compliance is reduced, even a small increase in CBF and, therefore, cerebral blood volume will increase ICP.

In health the intracranial volume is regulated by the crystalloid osmotic pressure gradient across the impermeable blood brain barrier (BBB, crystalloid osmotic pressure about 5000 mmHg). In areas where the BBB is damaged, the considerably lower colloid osmotic (i.e. oncotic) pressure (~20 mmHg) is solely responsible. With complete BBB disruption there is a pressure force equilibrium between brain tissue and capillary hydrostatic pressures. Therefore, after acute injury it is important to maintain crystalloid osmotic pressure (principally serum  $[Na^{++}]$ ), oncotic pressure (albumin) and, if ICP is pressure passive, control brain microvascular pressure.

Temperature and cerebral metabolic rate of oxygen ( $CMRO_2$ ) are positively related. Control of brain temperature offers the potential benefit of reducing CBF by reducing  $CMRO_2$ .

Systemic physiology has an important influence on ICP and a systemic cause for raised ICP should always be sought before an ICP intervention is undertaken.

### Introduction

Intracranial pressure (ICP) is a reflection of the relationship between alterations in craniospinal volume and the ability of the craniospinal axis to accommodate added volume. It cannot be estimated without directly measuring it.

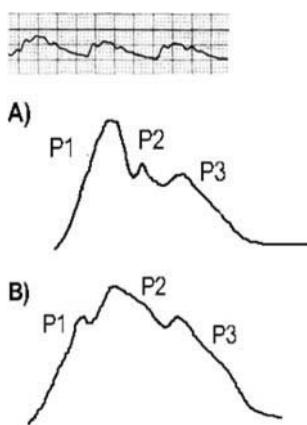
### Systemic physiological variables and intracranial pressure

The physiological variables that regulate cerebral blood flow (CBF) are the factors that influence acute changes in ICP. Arterial carbon dioxide gas tension ( $PaCO_2$ ) has a near linear relationship with CBF within the physiological range, producing a 2–6% increase of CBF for each millimetre of mercury of  $PaCO_2$  rise. An inverse relationship links low arterial oxygen content and CBF.

A direct relationship exists between CBF and cerebral metabolic rate for oxygen and glucose. CBF is kept constant throughout the normal physiological range of arterial pressure in health. These responses are often im-

### Intracranial pressure waveform

Brain tissue pressure and ICP increase with each cardiac cycle and, thus, the ICP waveform is a modified arterial pressure wave. The ICP pressure waveform has three distinct components that are related to physiological parameters (Fig. 1). The first peak ( $P1$ ) is the “percussive” wave and is due to arterial pressure being transmitted from the choroid plexus to the ventricle. It is sharply peaked and fairly consistent in amplitude. The second wave ( $P2$ ), often called the “tidal” wave, is thought to be due to brain tissue compliance. It is variable, indicates cerebral compliance and generally increases in amplitude



**Fig. 1** The intracranial pressure waveforms. The upper tracing is an example of an ICP waveform from a patient monitoring system in which can be identified the three distinct components, as indicated in the text. **A** depicts the situation of a compliant system, **B** A high pressure wave recorded from a non-compliant system in which P2 exceeds the level of the P1 waveform, due to a marked decrease in cerebral compliance

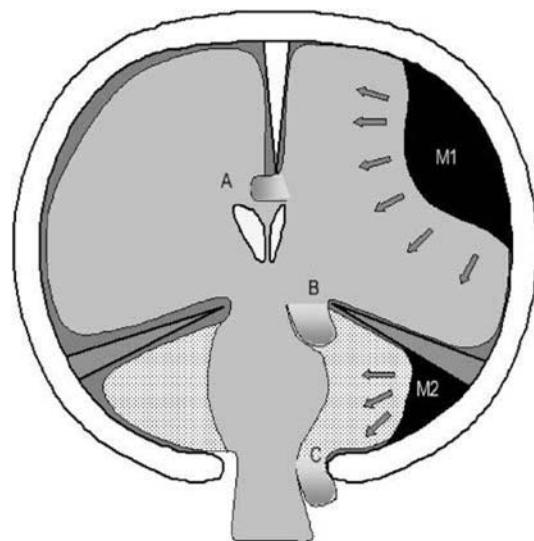
as compliance decreases; if it elevates or exceeds the level of the P1 waveform there will be a marked decrease in cerebral compliance. P3 is due to the closure of the aortic valve and therefore represents the dicrotic notch.

### Brain distortion

There are several different, but related, factors that have to be taken into consideration when a mass lesion within the cranial cavity starts to expand. One is distortion of the brain. Because of the viscoelastic properties of the brain, the tissues adjacent to the lesion will tend to flow away from it with axial movement of the brain as well as conventional displacement. Although this suggests that the local properties of the brain are important, the major factor responsible for spatial compensation is a reduction in the volume of intracranial cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The sequence of events is, therefore, local deformity with displacement of CSF, shift and distortion of the brain and eventually the appearance of internal herniae in the intact cranium (Fig. 2). These are the displacement of brain tissue from one intracranial compartment to another or the spinal canal. These herniae, in turn, lead to the development of pressure gradients because of obliteration of subarachnoid space and cisterns and secondary vascular complications such as haemorrhage and ischaemic brain damage.

### Prognosis

Almost from the time of the first attempt to monitor ICP in acute intracranial pathology, researchers have tried to



**Fig. 2** Schematic representation of herniation syndromes. According to the Monro & Kellie doctrine, increased volume and pressure in one compartment of the brain may cause shift of brain tissue to a compartment in which the pressure is lower. M1 is an expanding supratentorial lesion; M2 is an expanding mass in the posterior fossa. **A** Increased pressure on one side of the brain may cause tissue to push against and slip under the falx cerebri toward the other side of the brain, **B** Uncal (lateral transtentorial) herniation. Increased ICP from a lateral lesion pushes tissue downward, initially compressing third cranial nerve and, subsequently, ascending reticular activating system, leading to coma, **C** Infratentorial herniation. Downward displacement of cerebellar tissue through the foramen magnum producing medullary compression and coma

determine whether the prognosis of a patient can be obtained from ICP. Data from large prospective trials carried out from single centres and from well-controlled multi-centre studies have provided the most convincing evidence for a direct relationship between ICP and outcome. J. Douglas Miller and others [1] made detailed documentation of ICP during intensive care after traumatic brain injury (TBI). A strong relationship exists with survival and a recent analysis of the same data-set by regression tree methodology shows a strong relationship between ICP and functional recovery.

Narayan, in a prospective study in 133 severely head-injured patients, demonstrated that the outcome prediction rate was increased when the standard clinical data such as age, Glasgow Coma Score on admission (GCS) and pupillary response with extra-ocular and motor activity were combined with ICP monitoring data [2]. Marmarou, reporting on 428 patients' data from the National Institute of Health's Traumatic Coma Data Bank, showed that, following the usual clinical descriptors of age, admission motor score and abnormal pupils, the proportion of hourly ICP recordings greater than 20 mmHg was the next most significant predictor of outcome [3]. Jones studied prospectively 124 adult head-injured patients during in-

tensive care using a computerised data collection system capable of minute-by-minute monitoring of up to 14 clinically indicated physiological variables [4]. She found that ICP above 30 mmHg, arterial pressure below 90 mmHg and cerebral perfusion pressure (CPP) below 50 mmHg significantly affected patient morbidity.

In children, after TBI, Jones examined the early predictive value of any physiological derangement in ICU monitored parameters. This multi-centred study was novel in that abnormalities in ICP, blood pressure, heart rate and temperature were recorded when age-specific normal physiological thresholds were breached. ICP, managed according to a CPP protocol, was strongly predictive if abnormal in the initial ICU 48 h.

Although, in the past, there have been differing opinions about the contribution of continuous monitoring of ICP to reduction in mortality and morbidity following head injury, there is now sufficient evidence to remove doubt about the value of ICP monitoring towards improving outcome and allowing more informed decisions to be made about patient management.

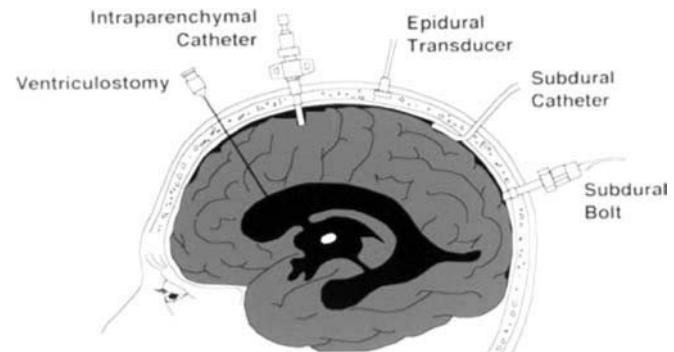
## Monitoring technology

The modern era of ICP monitoring started in the decade between 1950 and 1960. In 1951, Guillaume and Janny reported, even if their work went largely unnoticed, continuous clinical measurement of ICP with the use of an inductance manometer. In the United States, Ryder and Evans extended their physiological studies to patients.

A milestone in the history of ICP recording was the work carried out by Nils Lundberg (1965) on the use of bedside strain gauge manometers to record ICP continuously by ventriculostomy in more than 400 patients. Lundberg, anticipating modern practice, wrote in 1965 that “*The greatest value of recording the ventricular fluid pressure is the information it gives in cases of severe injury of the brain without hematoma. In these cases, intervention to decrease intracranial pressure by such means as hypertonic solutions, hyperventilation, hypothermia, drainage of fluid and removal of localized contusions, may be more rationally applied.*” The systematic application of those monitoring systems to the management of acute TBI did not take place for almost another decade.

By the mid 1970s, monitoring by means of a strain-gauge pressure transducer had begun to pervade neuro-surgical practice influenced by Becker and Miller’s good results in 160 traumatic brain-injured patients, using continuous ICP monitoring with a Statham strain gauge, treated according to defined clinical algorithms over a 4-year period.

In 1981, Flitter wrote that the technique used by Lundberg—the ventricular catheter and strain gauge transducer—for continuous monitoring “continues to serve as



**Fig. 3** Sites of measurement of intracranial pressure

a standard against which other devices can be compared”. This sentence still stands.

A ventricular catheter connected to an external strain gauge is the most accurate and low-cost method for ICP monitoring. This method has proved to be reliable and permit periodic re-zeroing and it also allows the benefit of therapeutic CSF drainage. Nevertheless, the potential risks of difficult positioning, in the presence of ventricular compression, and obstruction have lead to alternative intracranial sites for ICP monitoring (Fig. 3). In 2004, the most common location for ICP monitoring is the cerebral parenchyma. ICP measurements obtained with intraparenchymal transducers correlate well with the values obtained with intraventricular catheters. Contemporary intraparenchymal transducers may be classified as solid state, based on silicon chips with pressure-sensitive resistors forming a Wheatstone bridge, or of fiberoptic design. Although both systems are very accurate at the time of placement, they have been reported to zero-drift over time, which can result in an error after 4 or 5 days. Most clinicians, however, use these devices for a short period of time and these potential inaccuracies may not be clinically relevant. The cost of these devices is higher than the conventional ventricular system. Subdural and epidural monitors (fluid-coupled, pneumatic, solid state and fiberoptic) and externally placed anterior fontanelle monitors are less accurate. As the wise Douglas Miller wrote: “*It is difficult to know when the subdural catheter is underreading. For this reason, the method is being used less and less*”.

The overall safety of ICP monitoring devices is excellent, with clinically significant complications (e.g. infection and haematoma) occurring infrequently.

## How do intracranial pressure data help patient management?

The care of patients with acute brain injury and ICP monitoring is a cause for ongoing debate. There are few prospective randomised controlled trials of ICP inter-

ventions and no trial of ICP monitoring against no-ICP monitoring. When the Traumatic Coma Data Bank (TCDB) members approached the NIH to fund such a trial more than 14 years ago the view was that there was already sufficient evidence to support the use of ICP monitoring after TBI. These data included observational trials that showed a progressive reduction in mortality after TBI when ICP monitoring was instituted and subsequently when ICP was managed to a lower threshold [5].

Nevertheless, no monitor will improve outcome on its own. ICP data allow the clinician to manage the patient with an acute brain injury based upon objective data and improved outcomes will only occur if the data obtained are integrated into an appropriate therapeutic strategy. To date there are no adequately powered trials with patient outcome as the primary measure that have assessed an intervention for raised ICP. The Cochrane injuries group reviewed the available data to assess the effectiveness of interventions routinely used in the intensive care management of severe head injury, specifically: hyperventilation, mannitol, CSF drainage, barbiturates and corticosteroids, using the methodology of systematic review of

all unconfounded randomised trials [6, 7]. They concluded that existing trials have been too small to support or refute the existence of a real benefit from using these strategies and that further large-scale randomised trials of these interventions are required.

## Conclusion

Current management strategies for acute brain injury patients encompass the principle of physiological stability. Although there is debate about which precise thresholds should be striven for, without monitoring intracranial pressure (ICP) considerable information is missing and objective management of the patient is not possible. Interventions to reduce ICP are double-edged swords and direct measurement will reduce their indiscriminate usage. ICP monitors are inexpensive and have an acceptably low complication rate. They offer a high yield in information gained and should be the cornerstone of all critical care management of acute brain injury.

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## Fluid responsiveness in mechanically ventilated patients: a review of indices used in intensive care

**Abstract** *Objective:* In mechanically ventilated patients the indices which assess preload are used with increasing frequency to predict the hemodynamic response to volume expansion. We discuss the clinical utility and accuracy of some indices which were tested as bedside indicators of preload reserve and fluid responsiveness in hypotensive patients under positive pressure ventilation.  
*Results and conclusions:* Although

preload assessment can be obtained with fair accuracy, the clinical utility of volume responsiveness-guided fluid therapy still needs to be demonstrated. Indeed, it is still not clear whether any form of monitoring-guided fluid therapy improves survival.

**Keywords** Positive pressure ventilation · Hypotension · Volume expansion · Cardiac index

Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.

Niels Bohr

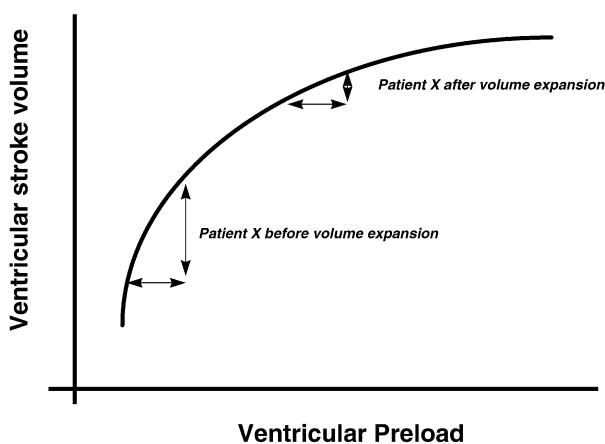
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### Introduction

Hypotension is one of the most frequent clinical signs observed in critically ill patients. To restore normal blood pressure, the cardiovascular filling (preload-defined as end-diastolic volume of both ventricular chambers), cardiac function (inotropism), and vascular resistance (afterload) must be assessed. Hemodynamic instability secondary to effective or relative intravascular volume depletion are very common, and intravascular fluid resuscitation or volume expansion (VE) allows restoration of ventricular filling, cardiac output and ultimately arterial blood pressure [1, 2]. However, in the Frank-Starling curve (stroke volume as a function of preload) the slope presents on its early phase a steep portion which is followed by a plateau (Fig. 1). As a consequence, when the plateau is reached, vigorous fluid resuscitation carries out the risk of generating volume overload and pulmonary edema and/or right-ventricular dysfunction. Thus in hypotensive patients methods able to unmask decreased preload and to predict whether car-

diac output will increase or not with VE have been sought after for many years. Presently, as few methods are able to assess ventricular volumes continuously and directly, static pressure measurements and echocardiographically measured ventricular end-diastolic areas are used as tools to monitor cardiovascular filling. Replacing static measurements, dynamic monitoring consisting in assessment of fluid responsiveness using changes in systolic arterial pressure, and pulse pressure induced by positive pressure ventilation have been proposed. The present review analyses the current roles and limitations of the most frequently used methods in clinical practice to predict fluid responsiveness in patients undergoing mechanical ventilation (MV) (Table 1).

One method routinely used to evaluate intravascular volume in hypotensive patients uses hemodynamic response to a fluid challenge [3]. This method consists in infusing a defined amount of fluid over a brief period of time. The response to the intravascular volume loading can be monitored clinically by heart rate, blood pressure, pulse pressure (systolic minus diastolic blood pressure), and urine output or by invasive monitoring with the measurements of the right atrial pressure (RAP), pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (Ppao), and cardiac output. Such a fluid management protocol assumes that the in-



**Fig. 1** Representation of Frank-Starling curve with relationship between ventricular preload and ventricular stroke volume in patient X. After volume expansion the same magnitude of change in preload recruit less stroke volume, because the plateau of the curve is reached which characterize a condition of preload independency

**Table 1** Studies of indices used as bedside indicators of preload reserve and fluid responsiveness in hypotensive patients under positive-pressure ventilation (BMI body mass index, CO cardiac output, CI cardiac index, SV stroke volume, SVI stroke volume index, IAC invasive arterial catheter, MV proportion of patients mechanically ventilated, ↑ increase, ↓ decrease, PAC pulmonary artery catheter, R responders, NR nonresponders, FC fluid challenge, HES hydroxyethyl starch, RL Ringer's lactate, Alb albumin, Δdown delta down, ΔPP respiratory variation in pulse pressure, LVEDV left-ventricular end diastolic volume, SPV systolic pressure variation, SVV stroke volume variation, TEE transesophageal echocardiography, Ppao pulmonary artery occlusion pressure, RAP right atrial pressure, RVEDV right-ventricular-end diastolic volume, FC fluid challenge)

Variable measured	Technique	n	MV (%)	Volume (ml) and type of plasma substitute	Duration of FC (min)	Definition of R	Definition of NR	p: difference in baseline values R vs. NR	Reference
Rap	PAC	28	46	250 Alb 5%	20–30	↑ SVI	↓ SVI or unchanged	NS	37
Rap	PAC	41	76	300 Alb 4.5%	30	↑ CI	CI ↓ or unchanged	NS	18
Rap	PAC	25	94.4	NaCl 9% + Alb 5% to ↑ Ppao	Until ↑Ppao	↑ SV ≥10%	↑ SV <10%	0.04	31
Rap	PAC	40	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	NS	36
Ppao	PAC	28	46	250 Alb 5%	20–30	↑ SVI	↓ SVI or unchanged	NS	37
Ppao	PAC	41	76	300 Alb 4.5%	30	↑ CI	CI ↓ or unchanged	NS	18
Ppao	PAC	29	69	300–500 RL	? bolus	↑ C0>10%	C0 ↓ or unchanged	<0.01	40
Ppao	PAC	32	84	300–500 RL	?	↑ CI >20%	↑ CI <20%	NS	41
Ppao	PAC	16	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	0.1	42
Ppao	PAC	41	100	500 pPentastarch	15	↑ SV ≥20%	↑ SV <20%	0.003	25
Ppao	PAC	25	94.4	NaCl 9%, Alb 5% to ↑ Ppao	Until ↑Ppao	↑ SV ≥10%	↑ SV <10%	0.001	31
Ppao	PAC	40	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	NS	36
Ppao	PAC	19	100	500–750 HES 6%	10	↑ C0>10%	↑ SV <10%	0.0085	39
RVEDV	PAC	29	69	300–500 RL	? bolus	↑ C0>10%	C0 ↓ or unchanged	<0.001	40
RVEDV	PAC	32	84	300–500 RL	?	↑ CI >20%	↑ CI <20%	<0.002	41
RVEDV	PAC	25	94.4	NaCl 9%, Alb 5% to ↑ Ppao	Until ↑Ppao	↑ SV ≥10%	↑ SV <10%	0.22	31
LVEDV	TEE	16	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	0.005	42
LVEDV	TEE	41	100	500 Pentastarch	15	↑ SV ≥20%	↑ SV <20%	0.012	25
LVEDV	TEE	19	100	8 ml/kg HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	NS	79
LVEDV	TEE	19	100	500–750 HES 6%	10	↑ C0>10%	↑ SV <10%	NS	39
SPV	IAC	16	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	0.0001	42
SPV	IAC	40	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	<0.001	36
SPV	IAC	19	100	500–750 HES 6%	10	↑ C0>10%	↑ SV <10%	0.017	39
Δdown	IAC	16	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	0.0001	42
Δdown	IAC	19	100	500–750 HES 6%	10	↑ C0>10%	↑ SV <10%	0.025	39
ΔPP	IAC	40	100	500 HES 6%	30	↑ CI >15%	↑ CI <15%	<0.001	36

travascular volume of the critically ill patients can be defined by the relationship between preload and cardiac output, and that changing preload with volume infusion affects cardiac output. Thus an increase in cardiac output following VE (patient responder) unmasks an hypovolemic state or preload dependency. On the other hand, lack of change or a decrease in cardiac output following VE (nonresponding patient) is attributed to a normovolemic, to an overloaded, or to cardiac failure state. Therefore, as the fluid responsiveness defines the response of cardiac output to volume challenge, indices which can predict the latter are necessary.

## Static measurements for preload assessment

### Measures of intracardiac pressures

According to the Frank-Starling law, left-ventricular preload is defined as the myocardial fiber length at the end

of the diastole. In clinical practice, the left-ventricular end-diastolic volume is used as a surrogate to define left-ventricular preload [4]. However, this volumetric parameter is not easily assessed in critically ill patients. In normal conditions, a fairly good correlation exists between ventricular end-diastolic volumes and mean atrial pressures, and ventricular preloads are approximated by RAP and/or Ppao in patients breathing spontaneously [5, 6]. Critically ill patients often require positive pressure ventilation, which modifies the pressure regimen in the thorax in comparison to spontaneous breathing. Indeed, during MV RAP and Ppao rise secondary to an increase in intrathoracic pressure which rises pericardial pressure. This pressure increase induces a decrease in venous return [7, 8] with first a decrease in right and few heart beats later in left-ventricular end-diastolic volumes, respectively [9, 10]. Under extreme conditions such as acute severe pulmonary emboli and/or marked hyperinflation, RAP may also rise secondary to an increase afterload of the right ventricle. Moreover, under positive pressure ventilation not only ventricular but also thoracopulmonary compliances and abdominal pressure variations are observed over time. Thus a variable relationship between cardiac pressures and cardiac volumes is often observed [11, 12, 13, 14]. It has also been demonstrated that changes in intracardiac pressure (RAP, Ppao) no longer directly reflect changes in intravascular volume [15]. Pinsky et al. [16, 17] have demonstrated that changes in RAP do not follow changes in right-ventricular end-diastolic volume in postoperative cardiac surgery patients under positive pressure ventilation. Reuse et al. [18] observed no correlation between RAP and right-ventricular end-diastolic volume calculated from a thermodilution technique in hypovolemic patients before and after fluid resuscitation. The discordance between RAP and right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measurements may result from a systematic underestimation of the effect of positive-pressure ventilation on the right heart [16, 17]. Nevertheless, the RAP value measured either with a central venous catheter or a pulmonary artery catheter is still used to estimate preload and to guide intravascular volume therapy in patient under positive pressure ventilation [19, 20].

On the left side, the MV-induced intrathoracic pressure changes, compared to spontaneously breathing, only minimally alters the relationship between left atrial pressure and left-ventricular end-diastolic volume measurement in postoperative cardiac surgery patients [21]. However, several other studies show no relationship between Ppao and left-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by either radionuclide angiography [12, 22], transthoracic echocardiography (TTE) [23], or transesophageal echocardiography (TEE) [24, 25, 26]. The latter findings may be related to the indirect pulmonary artery catheter method for assessing left atrial pressure [27, 28], although several studies have demonstrated

that Ppao using PAC is a reliable indirect measurement of left atrial pressure [29, 30] in positive-pressure MV patients.

#### *Right atrial pressure used to predict fluid responsiveness*

Wagner et al. [31] reported that RAP was significantly lower before volume challenge in responders than in nonresponders ( $p=0.04$ ) when patients were under positive pressure ventilation. Jellinek et al. [32] found that a RAP lower than 10 mmHg predicts a decrease in cardiac index higher than 20% when a transient 30 cm H<sub>2</sub>O increase in intrathoracic pressure is administrated. Presuming that the principle cause of decrease in cardiac output in the latter study was due to a reduction in venous return [9, 33, 34, 35], RAP predicts reverse VE hemodynamic effect. Nevertheless, some clinical investigations studying fluid responsiveness in MV patients have reported that RAP poorly predicts increased cardiac output after volume expansion [18, 36, 37]. Indeed, in these studies RAP did not differentiate patients whose cardiac output did or did not increase after VE (responders and nonresponders, respectively).

#### *Ppao used to predict fluid responsiveness*

Some studies have demonstrated that Ppao is a good predictor of fluid responsiveness [13, 31, 38]. Recently Bennett-Guerrero et al. [39] also found that Ppao was a better predictor of response to VE than systolic pressure variation (SPV) and left-ventricular end-diastolic area measured by TEE. However, several other studies noted that Ppao is unable to predict fluid responsiveness and to differentiate between VE-responders and VE-nonresponders [18, 25, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42]. The discrepancy between the results of these studies may partly reflect differences in patients' baseline characteristics (e.g., demographic differences, medical history, chest and lung compliances) at study entry. Furthermore, differences in location of the pulmonary artery catheter extremity relative to the left atrium may be present [43]. Indeed, according to its position, pulmonary artery catheter may display alveolar pressure instead of left atrial pressure (West zone I or II) [44]. The value of Ppao is also influenced by juxtacardiac pressure [45, 46] particularly if positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) is used [28]. To overcome the latter difficulty in MV patients when PEEP is used, nadir Ppao (Ppao measured after airway disconnection) may be used [46]. However, as nadir Ppao requires temporary disconnection from the ventilator, it might be deleterious to severely hypoxic patients. No study has yet evaluated the predictive value of nadir Ppao for estimating fluid responsiveness in MV patients.

In brief, although static intracardiac pressure measurements such as RAP and Ppao have been studied and used for many years for hemodynamic monitoring, their low predictive value in estimating fluid responsiveness in MV patients must be underlined. Thus using only intravascular static pressures to guide fluid therapy can lead to inappropriate therapeutic decisions [47].

#### Measures of ventricular end-diastolic volumes

Radionuclide angiography [48], cineangiography [49], and thermodilution [50] have been used to estimate ventricular volumes for one-half a century. In intensive care units, various methods have been used to measure ventricular end-diastolic volume at the bedside, such as radionuclide angiography [51, 52], TTE [23, 53, 54], TEE [55], and a modified flow-directed pulmonary artery catheter which allows the measurement of cardiac output and right-ventricular ejection fraction (and the calculation of right-ventricular end-systolic and end-diastolic volume) [31, 41].

#### *Right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by pulmonary artery catheter used to predict fluid responsiveness*

During MV right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured with a pulmonary artery catheter is decreased by PEEP [56] but is still well correlated with cardiac index [57, 58] and is a more reliable predictor of fluid responsiveness than Ppao [40, 41]. On the other hand, other studies have found no relationship between change in right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by pulmonary artery catheter and change in stroke volume in two series of cardiac surgery patients [16, 18]. Similarly, Wagner et al. [31] found that right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by pulmonary artery catheter was not a reliable predictor of fluid responsiveness in patients under MV, and that Ppao and RAP were superior to right-ventricular end-diastolic volume. The discrepancy between the results of these studies may partly reflect the measurement errors of cardiac output due to the cyclic change induced by positive pressure ventilation [59, 60, 61, 62], the inaccuracy of cardiac output measurement obtained by pulmonary artery catheter when the flux is low [63], and the influence of tricuspid regurgitation on the measurement of cardiac output [64]. Moreover, as right-ventricular end-diastolic volume is calculated (stroke volume divided by right ejection fraction), cardiac output becomes a shared variable in the calculation of both stroke volume and right-ventricular end-diastolic volume, and a mathematical coupling may have contributed to the close correlation observed between these two variables. Nevertheless, right-ventricular end-diastolic volume compared to Ppao may be useful in a small group of patients with

high intra-abdominal pressure or when clinicians are reluctant to obtain off-PEEP nadir Ppao measurements [65].

#### *Right-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by echocardiography used to predict fluid responsiveness*

TTE has been shown to be a reliable method to assess right-ventricular dimensions in patients ventilated with continuous positive airway pressure or positive-pressure ventilation [66, 67]. Using this approach, right-ventricular end-diastolic area is obtained on the apical four chambers view [68]. When no right-ventricular window is available, TEE is preferred to monitor right-ventricular end-volume in MV patients [53, 55, 69, 70, 71]. The latter method has become more popular in recent years due to technical improvements [72]. Nevertheless, no study has evaluated right-ventricular size measurements by TTE or TEE as a predictor of fluid responsiveness in MV patients.

#### *Left-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by echocardiography used to predict fluid responsiveness*

TTE has been used in the past to measure left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and/or area [23, 67, 73, 74] in MV patients. However, no study has evaluated the left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and/or area measured by TTE as predictors of fluid responsiveness in MV patients. Due to its greater resolving power, TEE easily and accurately assesses left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and/or area in clinical practice [53, 75] except in patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting [76]. However, different studies have reported conflicting results about the usefulness of left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and/or area measured by TEE to predict fluid responsiveness in MV patients. Cheung et al. [26] have shown that left-ventricular end-diastolic area measured by TEE is an accurate method to predict the hemodynamic effects of acute blood loss. Other studies have reported either a modest [25, 42, 77] or a poor [78, 79] predictive value of left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and area to predict the cardiac output response to fluid loading. Recent studies have also produced conflicting results. Bennett-Guerrero et al. [39] measuring left-ventricular end-diastolic area with TEE before VE found no significant difference between responders and nonresponders. Paradoxically, Reuter et al. [80] found that left-ventricular end-diastolic area index assessed by TEE before VE predicts fluid responsiveness more accurately than RAP, Ppao, and stroke volume variation (SVV). In the future three-dimensional echocardiography could supplant other methods for measuring left-ventricular end-diastolic volume and their predictive value of fluid responsiveness. In a word, although measurements of

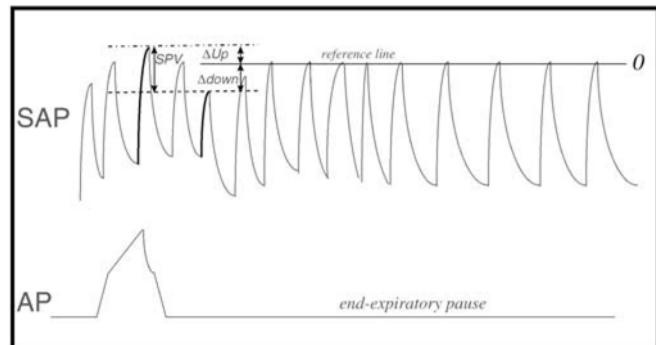
ventricular volumes should theoretically reflect preload dependence more accurately than other indices, conflicting results have been reported so far. These negative findings may be related to the method used to estimate end-diastolic ventricular volumes which do not reflect the geometric complexity of the right ventricle and to the influences of the positive intrathoracic pressure on left-ventricular preload, afterload and myocardial contractility [81].

### Dynamic measurements for preload assessment

Measure of respiratory changes in systolic pressure, pulse pressure, and stroke volume

Positive pressure breath decreases temporary right-ventricular end-diastolic volume secondary to a reduction in venous return [7, 82]. A decrease in right-ventricular stroke volume ensues which become minimal at end positive pressure breath. This inspiratory reduction in right-ventricular stroke volume induces a decrease in left-ventricular end-diastolic volume after a phase lag of few heart beats (due to the pulmonary vascular transit time [83]), which becomes evident during the expiratory phase. This expiratory reduction in left-ventricular end-diastolic volume induces a decrease in left-ventricular stroke volume, determining the minimal value of systolic blood pressure observed during expiration. Conversely, the inspiratory increase in left-ventricular end-diastolic volume determining the maximal value of systolic blood pressure is observed secondary to the rise in left-ventricular preload reflecting the few heart beats earlier increased in right-ventricular preload during expiration. Furthermore, increasing lung volume during positive pressure ventilation may also contribute to the increased pulmonary venous blood flow (related to the compression of pulmonary blood vessels [84]) and/or to a decrease in left-ventricular afterload [85, 86, 87], which together induce an increase in left-ventricular preload. Finally, a decrease in right-ventricular end-diastolic volume during a positive pressure breath may increase left-ventricular compliance and then left-ventricular preload [88]. Thus due to heart-lung interaction during positive pressure ventilation the left-ventricular stroke volume varies cyclically (maximal during inspiration and minimal during expiration).

These variations have been used clinically to assess preload status and predict fluid responsiveness in deeply sedated patients under positive pressure ventilation. In 1983 Coyle et al. [89] in a preliminary study demonstrated that the SPV following one mechanical breath is increased in hypovolemic sedated patients and decreased after fluid resuscitation. This study defined SPV as the difference between maximal and minimal values of systolic blood pressure during one positive pressure me-



**Fig. 2** Systolic pressure variation (SPV) after one mechanical breath followed by an end-expiratory pause. Reference line permits the measurement of  $\Delta$ up and  $\Delta$ down. **Bold** Maximal and minimal pulse pressure. AP Airway pressure; SAP systolic arterial pressure

chanical breath. Using the systolic pressure at end expiration as a reference point or baseline the SPV was further divided into two components: an increase ( $\Delta$ up) and a decrease ( $\Delta$ down) in systolic pressure vs. baseline (Fig. 2). These authors concluded that in hypovolemic patients  $\Delta$ down was the main component of SPV. These preliminary conclusions were confirmed in 1987 by Perel et al. [90] who demonstrated that SPV following a positive pressure breath is a sensitive indicator of hypovolemia in ventilated dogs. Thereafter Coriat et al. [91] demonstrated that SPV and  $\Delta$ down predict the response of cardiac index to VE in a group of sedated MV patients after vascular surgery. Exploring another pathophysiological concept, Jardin et al. [92] found that pulse pressure (PP; defined as the difference between the systolic and the diastolic pressure) is related to left-ventricular stroke volume in MV patients. Using these findings, Michard et al. [35, 36,] have shown that respiratory changes in PP [ $\Delta$ PP=maximal PP at inspiration (PP<sub>max</sub>) minus minimal PP at expiration (PP<sub>min</sub>)>; (Fig. 2) and calculated as:  $\Delta$ PP (%)= $100 \times (\text{PP}_{\text{max}} - \text{PP}_{\text{min}})/(\text{PP}_{\text{max}} + \text{PP}_{\text{min}})/2$ ] predict the effect of VE on cardiac index in patients with acute lung injury [35] or septic shock [36]. The same team proposed another approach to assess SVV in MV patients and to predict cardiac responsiveness to VE [79]. Using Doppler measurement of beat-to-beat aortic blood flow, they found that respiratory change in aortic blood flow maximal velocity predicts fluid responsiveness in septic MV patients. Measuring SVV during positive pressure ventilation by continuous arterial pulse contour analysis, Reuter et al. [80] have recently demonstrated that SVV accurately predicts fluid responsiveness following volume infusion in ventilated patients after cardiac surgery.

### *Systolic pressure variation used to predict fluid responsiveness*

The evaluation of fluid responsiveness by SPV is based on cardiopulmonary interaction during MV [93, 94]. In 1995 Rooke et al. [95] found that SPV is a useful monitor of volume status in healthy MV patients during anesthesia. Coriat et al. [91] confirmed the usefulness of SPV for estimating response to VE in MV patients after vascular surgery. Ornstein et al. [96] have also shown that SPV and  $\Delta_{\text{down}}$  are correlated with decreased cardiac output after controlled hemorrhage in postoperative cardiac surgical patients. Furthermore, Tavernier et al. [42] found  $\Delta_{\text{down}}$  before VE to be an accurate index of the fluid responsiveness in septic patients, and that a  $\Delta_{\text{down}}$  value of 5 mmHg is the cutoff point for distinguishing responders from nonresponders to VE. Finally, in septic patients Michard et al. [36] found that SPV is correlated with volume expansion-induced change in cardiac output. However, Denault et al. [81] have demonstrated that SPV is not correlated with changes in left-ventricular end-diastolic volume measured by TEE in cardiac surgery patients. Indeed, in this study, SPV was observed despite no variation in left-ventricular stroke volume, suggesting that SPV involves processes independent of changes in the left-ventricular preload (airway pressure, pleural pressure, and its resultant afterload) [81].

### *Pulse pressure variation used to predict fluid responsiveness*

Extending the concept elaborated by Jardin et al. [92], Michard et al. [36] found that  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$  predicted the effect of VE on cardiac output in 40 septic shock hypotensive patients. These authors demonstrated that both  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$  and SPV, when greater than 15%, are superior to RAP and Ppao, for predicting fluid responsiveness. Moreover,  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$  was more accurate and with less bias than SPV. These authors proposed  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$  as a surrogate for stroke volume variation concept [93], which has not been validated yet. In another study these authors [35] included VE in six MV patients with acute lung injury and found that  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$  is a useful guide to predict fluid responsiveness.

### *Stroke volume variation to predict fluid responsiveness*

Using Doppler TEE, Feissel et al. [79] studied changes in left-ventricular stroke volume induced by the cyclic positive pressure breathing. By measuring the respiratory variation in maximal aortic blood flow velocity these authors predicted fluid responsiveness in septic MV patients. Left-ventricular stroke volume was obtained by multiplying flow velocity time integral over aortic valve

by valve opening area during expiration. However, this finding may be biased, as expiratory flow velocity time integral is a shared variable in the calculation of both cardiac output and expiratory maximal aortic blood flow velocity and a mathematical coupling may contribute to the observed correlation between changes in cardiac output and variation in maximal aortic blood flow velocity. Finally, Reuter et al. [80] used continuous arterial pulse contour analysis and found that SVV during positive pressure breath accurately predicts fluid responsiveness following VE in ventilated cardiac surgery patients [80]. Using the receiver operating characteristics curve, these authors demonstrated that the area under the curve is statistically greater for SVV (0.82; confidence interval: 0.64–1) and SPV (0.81; confidence interval: 0.62–1) than for RAP (0.45; confidence interval: 0.17–0.74) ( $p<0.001$ ) [97]. Concisely, dynamic indices have been explored to evaluate fluid responsiveness in critically ill patients. All of them have been validated in deeply sedated patients under positive-pressure MV. Thus such indices are useless in spontaneously breathing intubated patients, a MV mode often used in ICU. Moreover, regular cardiac rhythm is an obligatory condition to allow their use.

### **Conclusion**

Positive pressure ventilation cyclically increases intra-thoracic pressure and lung volume, both of which decrease venous return and alter stroke volume. Thus VE which rapidly restore cardiac output and arterial blood pressure is an often used therapy in hypotensive MV patients and indices which would predict fluid responsiveness are necessary. RAP, Ppao, and right-ventricular end-diastolic volume, which are static measurements, have been studied but produced conflicting data in estimating preload and fluid responsiveness. On the other hand, SPV and  $\Delta_{\text{PP}}$ , which are dynamic measurements, have been shown to identify hypotension related to decrease in preload, to distinguish between responders and nonresponders to fluid challenge (Table 1), and to permit titration of VE in various patient populations.

Although there is substantial literature on indices of hypovolemia, only few studies have evaluated the cardiac output changes induced by VE in MV patients. Moreover, therapeutic recommendations regarding unmasked preload dependency states without hypotension need further studies. Finally, another unanswered question is related to patients outcome: does therapy guided by fluid responsiveness indices improve patients survival?

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## Different techniques to measure intra-abdominal pressure (IAP): time for a critical re-appraisal

**Abstract** The diagnosis of intra-abdominal hypertension (IAH) or abdominal compartment syndrome (ACS) is heavily dependant on the reproducibility of the intra-abdominal pressure (IAP) measurement technique. Recent studies have shown that a clinical estimation of IAP by abdominal girth or by examiner's feel of the tenseness of the abdomen is far from accurate, with a sensitivity of around 40%. Consequently, the IAP needs to be measured with a more accurate, reproducible and reliable tool. The role of the intra-vesical pressure (IVP) as the gold standard for IAP has become a matter of

debate. This review will focus on the previously described indirect IAP measurement techniques and will suggest new revised methods of IVP measurement less prone to error. Cost-effective manometry screening techniques will be discussed, as well as some options for the future with microchip transducers.

**Keywords** Intra-abdominal pressure · Intra-abdominal hypertension · Abdominal compartment syndrome · Intra-vesical pressure

### Introduction

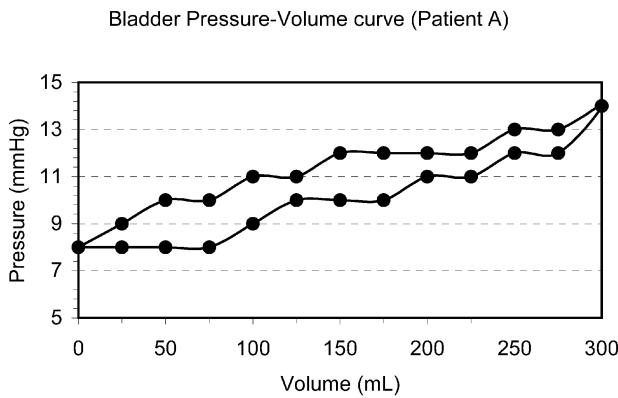
There is an exponential increase in studies on intra-abdominal hypertension (IAH) and abdominal compartment syndrome (ACS) in the literature. There is still controversy about the ideal method for measuring intra-abdominal pressure (IAP) [1, 2]. The intra-vesical route evolved as the gold standard. It, however, has considerable variability in the measurement technique, not only between individuals but also institutions. Common pitfalls are air bubbles in the system and wrong transducer positions. Variations in IAP from -6 to +30 mmHg have been reported previously [3]. A recent multicentre snapshot study showed that the coefficient of variation was around 25%, even up to 66% in some centres, raising questions on the reproducibility of the measurement itself. This makes it, difficult to compare literature data [4].

The volumes reported in the literature for bladder priming before the IAP measurement are not uniform (ranging from 50 to 250 ml). Injecting over 50 ml in a

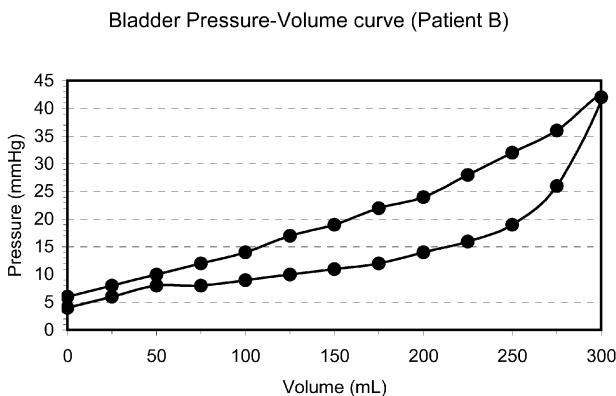
noncompliant bladder will raise intrinsic vesical pressure (IVP) and thus overestimate IAP [5, 6] (Fig. 1). By constructing bladder pressure volume curves we found that IVP was not raised when the volume instilled was limited to 50–100 ml [7] (Fig. 2). This is in accordance with others who found that baseline IAP alters the amount of volume in the bladder needed to increase IAP: the lower the baseline IAP, the higher the extra bladder volume needed for the same IAP increase [6].

The purpose of this report is: (1) to review the most commonly used indirect techniques for IAP measurement; (2) to provide the reader with a full description and important (dis)advantages of each technique; (3) to describe some new or revised techniques; and (4) to highlight the cost-effectiveness of each method.

## Panel A



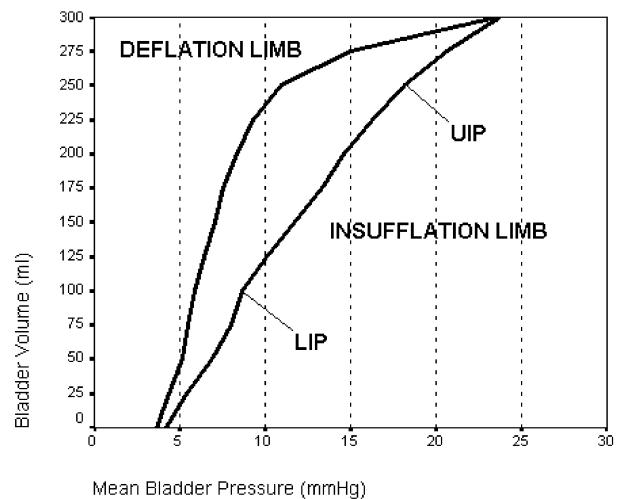
## Panel B



**Fig. 1 A** Bladder PV curve in a patient with a compliant bladder. Note that pressures are higher during insufflation than during deflation. Note that regardless of the amount of saline instilled in the bladder the pressures are comparable: 10 mmHg at 50 ml, 11 mmHg at 100 ml and 12 mmHg at 200 ml. **B** Bladder PV curve in a septic patient with a poor bladder compliance. Note that pressures are higher during insufflation than deflation. Note the significant difference in IAP value with regard to the amount of saline instilled in the bladder: 10 mmHg at 50 ml, 14 mmHg at 100 ml and 24 mmHg at 200 ml

### IAP assessment

In analogy with the paradigm “if you don’t take a temperature you can’t find a fever” (in Samuel Shem, *The house of god*, Dell Publishing, ISBN: 0-440-13368-8), one can state that “if you don’t measure IAP you cannot make a diagnosis of IAH or ACS”. Abdominal perimeter cannot be used as an alternative method for IAP. In a recent study of 132 paired measurements in 12 ICU patients, we found a poor correlation between IAP and abdominal perimeter ( $R^2=0.12$ ,  $P=0.04$ ) [8]. Clinically significant IAH may be present in the absence of abdominal distension [9]. Chronic abdominal distension



**Fig. 2** Plot of the “insufflation” and “deflation” PV curve as a curve fit of the means of 13 measurements in six mechanically ventilated patients. The bladder PV curves were obtained by instilling sterile saline into the bladder with 25-ml increments. A lower inflection point can be seen at a bladder volume of 50–100 ml and an upper inflection point (UIP) at a bladder volume of 250 ml. The difference in bladder pressure was  $2.7 \pm 3.3$  mmHg between 0 and 50 ml volume,  $1.7 \pm 1.2$  mmHg between 50 and 100 ml,  $7.7 \pm 5.7$  mmHg between 50 and 200 ml and  $16.8 \pm 13.4$  mmHg between 50 and 300 ml. See text for explanation

with sufficient time for adaptation, as seen with pregnancy, obesity, cirrhosis, or ovarian tumours, is an example of increased abdominal perimeter that is not necessarily accompanied by an increase in IAP. Other studies have shown that clinical IAP estimation by putting one or two hands on the abdomen is also far from accurate, with a sensitivity of only around 40%. So, one needs to measure it [10–12]. The question then arises: how? Since the abdomen and its contents can be considered as relatively non-compressive and primarily fluid in character, subject to Pascal’s law, the IAP can be measured in nearly every part of the abdomen. Different direct and indirect measurement methods have been reported.

Table 1 lists the different techniques and their major advantages and disadvantages, with an overall score calculated by dividing twice the number of advantages by the total number of (dis)advantages reported. Table 2 lists the cost estimate in Euros for the different techniques, with the cost of the initial set-up as well as the cost per measurement. Cost estimations were based on the number of measurements per day as well as the duration of the measurement period.

**Table 1** Overview of the advantages (-) and disadvantages (+) of the different techniques for indirect IAP measurement. The overall score was calculated as the fraction of twice the number of advantages and the total number of (dis)advantages

General information	Bladder techniques				Manometry		
Author	Kron	Iberti	Cheatham	Malbrain	Harrahal	Lee	Malbrain
Reference	[13]	[16, 17]	[18]	Current	[26]	[27]	[28]
Publication year	1984	1987, 1989	1998	2003	1998	2002	2002
<b>Properties</b>	Fluid	Fluid	Fluid	Fluid	Fluid	Fluid	Fluid
General — Volume	50 ml	250 ml	50 ml	50 ml	?	?	50 ml
Manipulation	+++	++	+	+	-	-	-
Difficult	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Time consuming initial set-up	+++	++	+	+	-	-	-
Time consuming next measurement	+++	++	-	-	-	-	-
Cost of device initial set-up	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Cost per measurement	++	++	+	+	-	-	-
Interference urine output	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Glass syringe	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Technique							
No repeated measurements	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
No continuous trend	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Not automated	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Recalibration	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Volume not standardised	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Not accurate or reproducible	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Not well validated	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
Air-bubbles	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Multiple menisci	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
Bio-filter blocking	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
MMC interference	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hydrostatic fluid column							
Zero-reference problem	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Over-under damping	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Body position dependent	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Risks							
Needle stick injury	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
Urinary infection	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Sepsis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contra-indications							
Bladder trauma	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Neurogenic bladder	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Hematuria	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Gastric trauma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other abdominal trauma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Overall conclusion</b>							
Disadvantages	30	26	21	19	13	13	13
Advantages	8	9	10	12	18	18	18
Overall score	34.8%	0.9%	48.8%	55.8%	73.5%	73.5%	73.5%
Clinical indications	None	None	Screening	Intermittent monitoring	None	?	Quick screening

## Bladder

The original open system single measurement technique [13]

### Description

Traditionally the bladder has been used as the method of choice for measuring IAP. The technique was originally

described by Kron and co-workers [13] and disrupts for each IAP measurement what is normally a closed sterile system. Thus, IAP measurement involves disconnecting the patient's Foley catheter and instilling 50–100 ml of saline using a sterile field. After reconnection, the urinary drainage bag is clamped distal to the culture aspiration port. For each individual IAP measurement a 16-gauge needle is then used to Y-connect a manometer or pressure

**Table 1** (continued)

<b>General Information</b>	<b>IVC</b>	<b>Uterus</b>	<b>Rectum</b>	<b>Stomach</b>			
Author	Lacey	Dowdle	Shafik	Collee	Sugrue	Malbrain	Malbrain
Reference	[29]	[31]	[30]	[20]	[21, 22]	Current	Current
Publication	1987	1997	1997	1993	1994, 2000	2003	2003
<b>Properties</b>	Fluid	Microchip	Fluid-filled balloon	Fluid	Air-filled balloon	Air-filled balloon	Air-filled balloon
General-Volume			?	50 ml	2 ml	1–2 ml	0.1 ml
Manipulation	++	+++	+++	++	+	+	-
Difficult	+	++	++	+	+	+	-
Time taken for initial set-up	++	++	++	++	++	+	+
Time taken for next measurement	-	++	++	++	+	-	-
Cost of device initial set-up	++	++++	++	+	+++	++	++
Cost per measurement	-	-	-	++	-	-	-
Interference urine output	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glass syringe	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
Technique							
No Repeated measurements	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
No continuous trend	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
Not automated	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Recalibration	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Volume not standardised	-	+	+	+	+	+	-
Not accurate or reproducible	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Not well validated	+++	+++	++	+	+	+	+
Air-bubbles	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Multiple menisci	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bio-filter blocking	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MMC interference	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
Hydrostatic fluid column							
Zero-reference problem	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Over-under damping	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
Body position dependent	+	++	++	++	-	-	-
Risks							
Needle stick injury	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urinary infection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sepsis	+++	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contra-indications							
Bladder trauma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Neurogenic bladder	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hematuria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gastric trauma	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Other abdominal trauma	-	+	+	-	-	-	-
<b>Overall conclusion</b>							
Disadvantages	21	28	25	24	15	12	5
Advantages	16	13	13	11	18	19	26
Overall score	60.4%	48%	50.1%	47.8%	70.6%	76%	91.2%
Clinical implications	?	None	?	Screening	Research	Research	APP trend, Research

transducer. The symphysis pubis is used as reference line. (See ESM addendum 1.)

#### *Advantages and disadvantage (Table 1)*

This technique implicates a lot of time-consuming manipulations that disrupt a closed sterile system at every measurement. It has all the problems that come along with the hydrostatic convective fluid column. Even though

zero-reference at the symphysis pubis poses no problem, the problems come when the same pressure transducer is used for IAP and CVP, with zero-reference at the midaxillary line. Putting the patient upright with concomitant rise in the transducer may lead to underestimation of IAP, while putting the patient in the Trendelenburg position can lead to overestimation. The fact that recalibration needs to be done before every measurement augments the risk for errors. We have all seen the “magic” drop or rise in CVP at changes of nurse shifts, the same

**Table 2** Cost estimation (in Euros) of the different IAP measurement techniques; cost of initial set-up and next measurement, as well as cost projection based on number of IAP measurements per day and duration of measurement period. The cost evaluation was based on the following estimates: transducer: €24.75; 50 ml of saline: €0.33; syringe: €0.36; needle: €0.023; Foley catheter: € 0.53; nasogastric tube: €0.53;

Technique	Author	Reference	Set-up cost	Cost per measurement	2 times per day		6 times per day		12 times per day			
					1 week	2 weeks	3 weeks	4 weeks	1 week	2 weeks	3 weeks	4 weeks
Bladder	Kron. Iberti Cheatham Malbrain	[13] [17] [18]	30.6 30.2 31.3 34.7	3.7 2.7 1.3 1.0	5.9 4.8 3.7 3.6	4.8 3.8 2.6 2.3	4.4 3.4 2.3 1.9	4.3 3.2 2.1 1.7	4.1 3.0 1.7 1.4	3.9 2.9 1.6 1.3	3.9 3.0 1.7 1.2	3.8 2.8 1.5 1.1
	Collee Malbrain Sugrue Malbrain	[20] [21] [21] [30]	29.9 101.7 202.7 83.7	2.3 0.1 0.3 0.3	4.5 7.4 14.7 6.2	3.4 3.7 5.1 3.2	3.1 2.5 5.1 2.2	2.9 1.9 3.9 1.8	3.1 2.7 5.1 2.2	2.7 2.6 1.9 1.3	2.5 2.5 1.7 0.9	2.5 2.5 0.7 0.5
	Shafrik Lee Malbrain	[27] [28] [29]	70.1 1.2 18.2	0.2 0.3 0.3	5.2 0.4 1.6	2.7 0.4 1.0	1.8 0.4 0.8	1.4 0.4 0.7	1.0 0.4 0.6	0.7 0.3 0.5	0.7 0.3 0.6	0.4 0.3 0.4
	Lacey	[29]	66.3	0.2	4.9	2.5	1.8	1.4	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.4
	Dowdle	[31]	1278.1	0.1	91.4	45.7	30.5	22.9	15.3	10.2	7.7	5.2
	Microchip											3.9

can happen with IAP. Furthermore, a fluid-filled system can produce artefacts that further distort the IAP pressure waveform. Failure to recognise these recording system artefacts can lead to interpretation errors [14]. It can oscillate spontaneously, and these oscillations can distort the IAP pressure curve. The performance of a resonant system is defined by the resonant frequency (this is the inherent oscillatory frequency) and the damping factor (this is a measure of the tendency of the system to attenuate the pressure signal). Therefore, any fluid-filled system is prone to changes in body-position and over- or underdamping due to the presence of air-bubbles, a tubing that is too compliant or too long, etc. A rapid flush test should, therefore, always be performed before an IAP reading in order to obtain an idea of the dynamic response properties and to minimise these distortions and artefacts [16]. Confirmation of correct measurement can be done by inspection of respiratory variations and by gently applying oscillations to the abdomen that should be immediately transmitted and seen on the monitor with a quick return to baseline (Fig. 3). In case of a damped signal the flush test should be repeated.

Other disadvantages are: it is an intermittent technique that interferes with urine output without the possibility of obtaining a continuous trend, it places the patient at increased risk of urinary tract infection or sepsis, and subjects healthcare providers to the risk of needle stick injuries and exposure to blood and body fluids [13]. In conclusion, the Kron technique has at the present time no clinical implications.

## The closed system single measurement technique [16, 17]

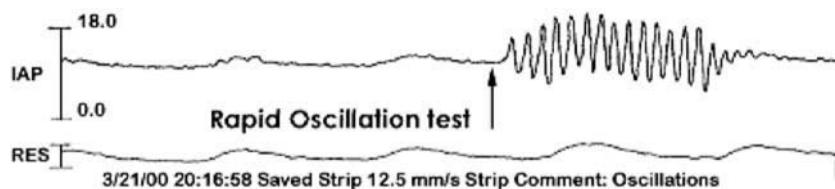
### Description

Iberti and co-workers reported the use of a closed system drain and transurethral bladder pressure monitoring method [16, 17]. Using a sterile technique they infused an average of 250 ml of normal saline through the urinary catheter to purge catheter tubing and bladder. The bladder catheter is clamped and a 20-gauge needle is inserted through the culture aspiration port for each IAP measurement. The transducer is zeroed at the symphysis and mean IAP is read after a 2-min equilibration period. (See ESM addendum 2)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

It has the same disadvantages related to the hydrostatic fluid column as the Kron technique, and since it is not needle-free it also subjects health care workers to needle-stick injuries [10, 11].

The advantage compared with the Kron technique is that it is simpler, less time-consuming, and there are fewer manipulations. In conclusion, the Iberti technique



**Fig. 3** Confirmation of correct IAP measurement can be done by inspection of respiratory variations and by gently applying oscillations to the abdomen that should be immediately transmitted and seen on the monitor with a quick return to the baseline

has at the present time limited clinical implications (e.g. screening for IAH).

The closed system repeated measurement technique [18]

#### Description

Cheatham and Safcsak reported a revision of Kron's original technique [18]. A standard intravenous infusion set is connected to 1,000 ml of normal saline, two stopcocks, a 60-ml Luer-lock syringe and a disposable pressure transducer. An 18-gauge plastic intravenous infusion catheter is inserted into the culture aspiration port of the Foley catheter and the needle is removed. The infusion catheter is attached to the pressure tubing and the system flushed with saline. (See ESM addendum 3.)

#### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

It has the same inconveniences related to any fluid-filled system as described with the Kron and Iberti techniques. It can pose problems after a couple of days because the culture aspiration port membrane can become leaky or the catheter kinky, leading to false IAP measurement. The fact that the infusion catheter needs to be replaced after a couple of days could increase the infection risk and needle-stick injuries.

This technique has minimal side effects and complications, e.g. without an increased risk for urinary tract infection [19]. It is safer and less invasive, takes less than 1 min, is more efficient with repeated measurements possible and thus is more cost-effective [18]. This technique is ideal for screening and monitoring for a short period of time (a couple of days) because of leakage.

#### The revised closed system repeated measurement technique

#### Description

The technique of Cheatham and Safcsak was modified (Fig. 4), as follows. A ramp with three stopcocks is

inserted in the drainage tubing connected to a Foley catheter (Fig. 4A). A standard infusion set is connected to a bag of 1,000 ml of normal saline and attached to the first stopcock. A 60-ml syringe is connected to the second stopcock and the third stopcock is connected to a pressure transducer via rigid pressure tubing. The system is flushed with normal saline and the pressure transducer is zeroed at the symphysis pubis (or the midaxillary line when the patient is in complete supine position). Figure 4B shows a picture of the device in a patient with a close-up of the manifold set with conical connectors. (See ESM addendum 4.)

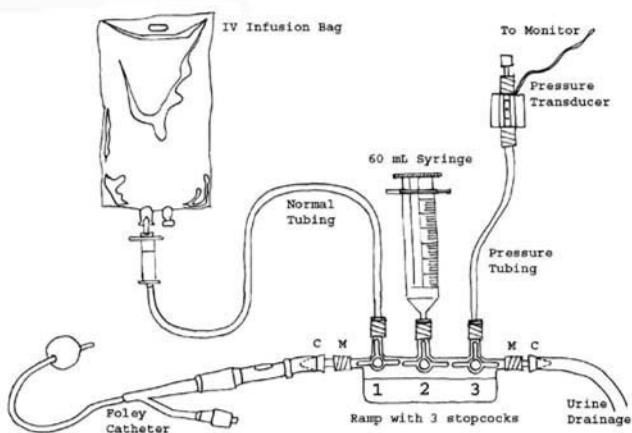
#### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

It has the same inconveniences related to a fluid-filled system as described with the Kron, Iberti or Cheatham technique. This technique has the same advantages as the Cheatham technique, with a required nursing time less than 2 min per measurement, a minimized risk of urinary tract infection and sepsis since it is a closed sterile system, the possibility of repeated measurements and reduced cost. Since it is a needle-free system it does not interfere with the culture aspiration port and the risk of injuries is absent. This technique can be used for screening or for monitoring for a longer period of time (2–3 weeks).

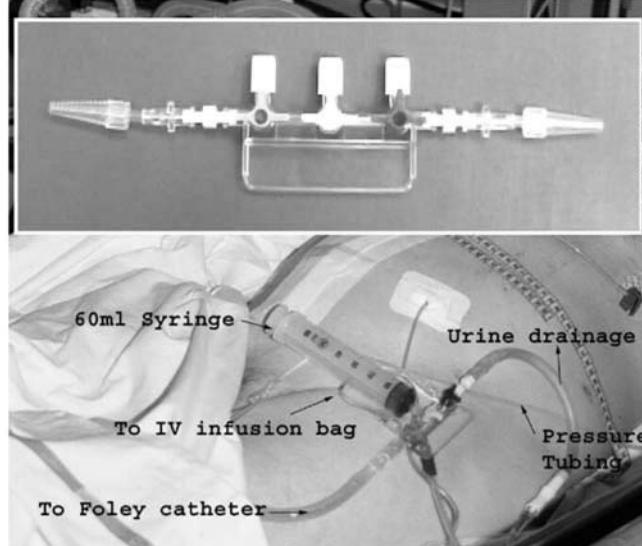
#### The revised closed system repeated measurement technique

In an anuric patient, continuous IAP recordings are possible via the bladder using a closed system connected to the Foley catheter after the culture aspiration port or directly to the Foley catheter using a conical connection piece connected to a standard pressure transducer via pressure tubing (Fig. 5). After initial "calibration" of the system with 50 ml of saline and zeroing at the symphysis pubis, the transducer is taped at the symphysis or thigh and a continuous IAP reading can be obtained. Daily calibration can be done in oliguric patients after voiding or rest diuresis.

Panel A



Panel B



**Fig. 4 A** A closed needle-free revised method for measurement of intra-abdominal pressure. A standard intravenous infusion set is connected to a bag of 1,000 ml of normal saline and attached to the first stopcock. A 60-ml syringe is connected to the second stopcock and the third stopcock is connected to a pressure transducer via rigid pressure tubing. The system is flushed with normal saline and the pressure transducer is zeroed at the symphysis pubis. To measure IAP, the urinary drainage tubing is clamped distal to the ramp-device, 50 ml of normal saline is aspirated from the IV bag into the syringe and then instilled in the bladder. After opening the stopcocks to the pressure transducer mean IAP can be read from the bedside monitor. See ESM addendum 4 for explanation. **B** Mounted patient view of the device and close up of manifold and conical connection pieces

## Conclusion

In conclusion, if one wants to use IVP as estimate for IAP the Cheatham or revised technique is preferred over the Kron or Iberti technique. The revised methods for IAP



**Fig. 5** Close up view of a closed needle-free system for continuous intra-abdominal pressure measurement in an anuric patients, using a conic connection piece (conical connector with female or male lock fitting; B Braun, Melsungen, Germany — Ref. 4896629 or 4438450) connected to a standard pressure transducer via pressure tubing

measurement via the bladder maintain the patient's Foley catheter as a closed system, limiting the risk of infection. Since these are needle-free systems they also avoid the risks of needle-stick injury and overcome the problems of leakage and catheter knick in the method described by Cheatham. They are more cost-effective, and facilitate repeated measurements of IAP.

## Stomach

The classic intermittent technique [20]

### Background and description

The IAP can also be measured by means of a nasogastric or gastrostomy tube and this method can be used when the patient has no Foley catheter in place, or when accurate bladder pressures are not possible due to the absence of free movement of the bladder wall. In case of bladder trauma, peritoneal adhesions, pelvic haematomas or fractures, abdominal packing, or a neurogenic bladder, IVP may overestimate IAP, and the procedure used for the bladder can then be applied via the stomach [20]. (See ESM addendum 5.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

The same inconveniences as with every fluid-filled system apply. Another disadvantage is that gastric pressures might interfere with the migrating motor complex or with nasogastric feeding. Furthermore all air needs to be aspirated from the stomach before measuring IAP, something that is difficult to verify.

The advantages are that it is cheap, does not interfere with urine output, and the risks of infection and needle-stick injuries are absent. This cost-effective technique is ideal for screening.

## The semi-continuous technique [21, 22]

### *Background and description*

Sugrue and co-workers assessed the accuracy of measuring simultaneous IVP and IAP via the balloon of a gastric tonometer during laparoscopic cholecystectomy [21]. They found a good correlation between both methods. This technique allows a trend to be obtained. We recently validated these results and found good correlation between the classic gastric method, the tonometer method and IVP [22]. Simultaneous IAPtono and PrCO<sub>2</sub> measurement was also possible. (See ESM addendum 6.)

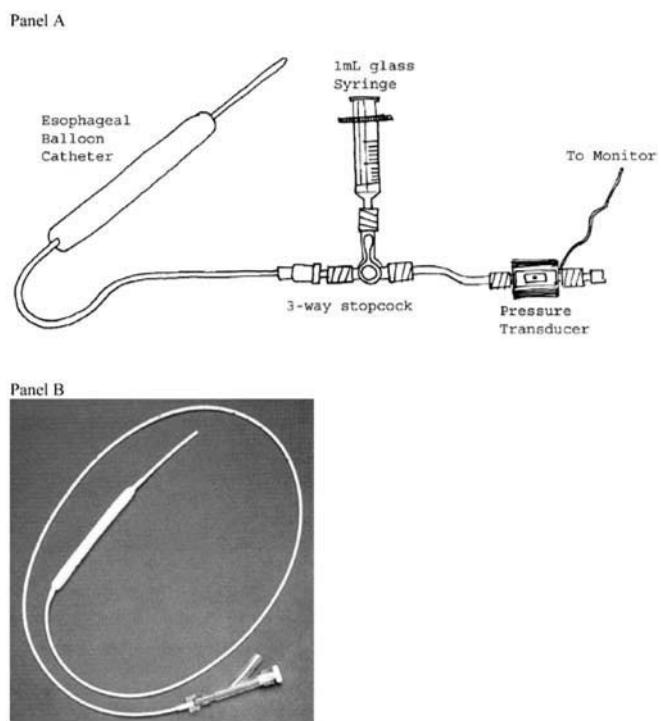
### *Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)*

Measurement via the tonometer balloon limits the risks and has major advantages over the standard intravesical method: no infection risk and no interference with estimation of urine output. Simultaneous measurement of IAP and PrCO<sub>2</sub> is possible; however, only in an intermittent way. Since it is air-filled it has none of the disadvantages associated with fluid-filled systems: no problem with zero-reference, over- or underdamping or body position. A possible disadvantage is the effect on interpretation of IAP values by the migrating motor complex. Recording the “diastolic” value of IAP at end-expiration can solve this problem. Other problems are that a 5-ml glass syringe is needed and that no data are available on effects of enteral feedings on these IAP measurements. This technique could be used for study purposes and clinicians interested in simultaneous CO<sub>2</sub> gap and IAP monitoring.

### *The revised semi-continuous technique*

#### *Description*

An oesophageal balloon catheter is inserted into the stomach. When the balloon is in the stomach, the whole respiratory IAP pressure wave will be positive and increasing upon inspiration in case of a functional diaphragm. If the balloon is too high in the thorax the pressure will flip from positive to negative on inspiration measuring oesophageal or pleural pressure instead. A standard three-way stopcock is connected to a pressure transducer (Fig. 6A). All air is evacuated from the balloon with a glass syringe and 1–2 ml of air reintroduced to the balloon. The balloon is connected via a “dry” system to the transducer, the transducer itself is NOT classically connected to a pressurized bag and *not* flushed with normal saline in order to avoid air/fluid interactions. The transducer is zeroed to atmosphere and IAP is read end-

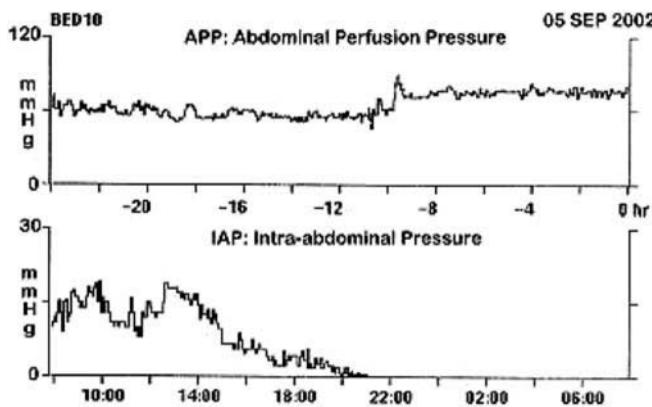


**Fig. 6 A** An oesophageal balloon catheter is inserted into the stomach (Oesophageal balloon catheter set, adult size with PTFE coated stylet; Ackrad Laboratories, Cranford, N.J., USA — Ref. 47-9005, see at [http://www.ackrad.com/products/c-balloon\\_catheter.cfm](http://www.ackrad.com/products/c-balloon_catheter.cfm) or compliance catheter female or male, International Medical Products, Zutphen, Netherlands, distributed by Allegiance — Ref. 84310). A standard three-way stopcock is connected to the now “nasogastric” tube; one end is connected to a pressure transducer via arterial tubing. All air is evacuated from the balloon with a glass syringe and 1 ml of air reintroduced to the balloon. A glass syringe is recommended to minimize the risk of pulling a negative pressure inside the catheter prior to reintroducing the 1 ml air. The balloon is connected via a “dry” system to the transducer, the transducer itself is *not* classically connected to a pressurized bag and *not* flushed with normal saline in order to avoid air/fluid interactions. The transducer is zeroed to atmosphere and IAP is read end-expiratory. See text for explanation. **B** Close-up view of the oesophageal balloon catheter

expiratory. Figure 6B shows a close-up of the oesophageal balloon catheter. (See ESM addendum 7.)

### *Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)*

A disadvantage is that the air in the balloon gets resorbed after a couple of hours (Fig. 7), so that “recalibration” of the balloon is necessary with a 2–5 ml glass syringe for continuous measurement, this might cause inaccurate measurement if the nurse waits too long for recalibration or if the re-instilled volume is not exactly the same as the previous one. It is less time-consuming and has all the advantages of an air-filled system (cfr tonometer). By



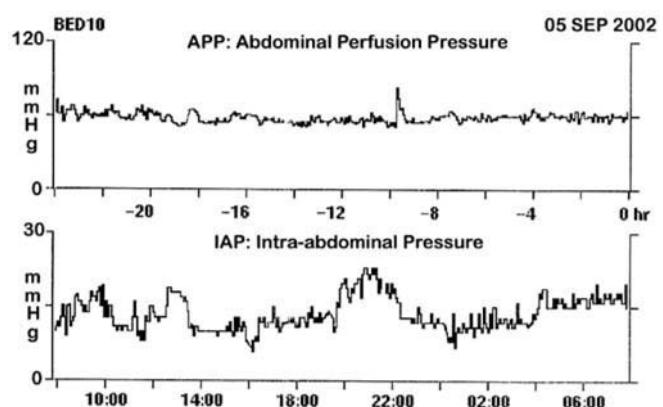
**Fig. 7** A trend of 24-h IAP and APP recordings obtained with an oesophageal balloon placed in the stomach (Ackrad). Note the resorption of air after a couple of hours, with loss of IAP signal, confirming the need for recalibration

using this technique the cost of IAP is further reduced depending on the catheter used. Moreover, a semi-continuous measurement of IAP as a trend over time is possible. The oesophageal balloon catheter price ranges from €15 (International Medical Systems, The Netherlands) to €55 (Ackrad, USA). This technique is ideal for monitoring for a longer period of time; however, when using multiple tubes the risk of sinusitis or infection needs to be evaluated in the future.

#### The continuous fully-automated technique

##### Description: IAP measurement with the air-pouch system

The IAP-catheter is introduced like a nasogastric tube; it is equipped with an air pouch at the tip. The catheter has one lumen that connects the air-pouch with the IAP-monitor and one lumen that takes the guide wire for introduction. The pressure transducer, the electronic hardware, and the device for filling the air-pouch are integrated in the IAP-monitor. Once every hour the IAP-monitor opens the pressure transducer to atmospheric pressure for automatic zero adjustment. The air-pouch is then filled with a volume of 0.1 ml required for accurate pressure transmission. Initial validation in ICU patients and laparoscopic surgery showed good correlation with the standard IVP method [23]. Recently Schachtrupp and co-authors used the same technique to directly measure IAP in a porcine model and found a very good correlation between the air pouch system and direct insufflator pressure ( $R^2=0.99$ ) with a mean bias of  $0.5\pm2.5$  mmHg and small limits of agreement (-4.5 to 5.4 mmHg) [24]. (See ESM addendum 8.)



**Fig. 8** A continuous trend of 24-h IAP and APP recordings obtained with the Spiegelberg balloon-tipped IAP catheter placed in the stomach. Note the absence of resorption of air due to automated recalibration every hour. Note also the effect of CAPD fluid inflow on IAP. If IAP was measured only twice a day the fluctuations and peak pressures would have been missed

#### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

This technique has no major disadvantage except that validation in humans is still in its infant stage. The advantages are those related to other gastric and air-filled methods. In summary, it is simple, fast, accurate, reproducible, and fully automated, so that a real continuous 24-h trend can be obtained (Fig. 8). This technique is not suited for screening, but is best for continuous fully automated monitoring for a long period of time. Since it is less prone to errors and most cost-effective if in place for a longer period of time, this technique has a lot of potential in becoming the future standard for multicentre research purposes.

#### Conclusion

The revised methods via the stomach have the advantage of being free from interference caused by wrong transducer positions, since the creation of a conductive fluid column is not needed as air is used as the transmitting medium. The last described fully automated technique also gives a continuous tracing of IAP together with abdominal perfusion pressure (APP) in analogy with intracranial pressure and cerebral perfusion pressure, allowing both parameters to be monitored as a trend over time. The APP is calculated by subtracting IAP from the mean arterial blood pressure. Recent data showed the importance of APP as a superior marker for IAH to titrate better the resuscitation of patients with IAH and ACS, hence avoiding end-organ failure and associated morbidity and mortality [2, 25].

## Manometry

The classic technique [1, 2, 26]

### Description

A quick idea of the IAP can also be obtained in a patient without a pressure transducer connected by using his own urine as the transducing medium, first described by nurse Harrahill [1, 2, 26]. One clamps the Foley catheter just above the urine collection bag. The tubing is then held at a position of 30–40 cm above the symphysis pubis and the clamp is released. The IAP is indicated by the height (in cm) of the urine column from the pubic bone. The meniscus should show respiratory variations. This rapid estimation of IAP can only be done in case of sufficient urine output. In an oliguric patient 50 ml saline can be injected as priming. (See ESM addendum 9.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

It has all the inconveniences that come along with a fluid-filled system as described before. However, since it is needle-free it poses no risks for injuries. It allows repeated measurements, is very inexpensive and fast with minimal manipulation. Since the volume re-instilled into the bladder is not constant raising questions on accuracy and reproducibility, it has limited clinical implications.

### The U-tube technique [27]

### Description

In a recent animal study, Lee and co-workers compared direct insufflated abdominal pressure with indirect bladder, gastric and inferior vena cava pressures [27]. IVP was measured by both the standard and U-tube technique. With the U-tube technique, the catheter tubing was raised approximately 60 cm above the animal to form a U-tube manometer, and IVP was measured as the height of the meniscus of urine from the pubic symphysis. The authors found a good correlation between the U-tube pressure and other direct and indirect techniques. (See ESM addendum 10.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

It has the same advantages and inconveniences as the classic “Harrahill” technique, as with the previous technique the clinical validation is poor. The major advantage of this technique is that the volume re-instilled into the bladder is more stable (but still not well defined), so it can be used as a quick screening method.

## The Foleymanometer technique [28]

### Description

We recently tested a prototype (Holtech Medical, Copenhagen, Denmark) for IAP measurement using the patients’ own urine as pressure transmitting medium [28]. A 50 ml container fitted with a bio-filter for venting is inserted between the Foley catheter and the drainage bag (Fig. 9A). The container fills with urine during drainage; when the container is elevated, the 50 ml of urine flows back into the patient’s bladder, and IAP can be read from the position of the meniscus in the clear manometer tube between the container and the Foley catheter (Fig. 9B). We found a good correlation between the IAP obtained via the Foleymanometer and the “gold standard” in 119 paired measurements ( $R^2=0.71$ ,  $P<0.0001$ ). The analysis according to Bland and Altman showed that both measurements were almost identical with a mean bias of  $0.17\pm0.8(\text{SD})$  mmHg (95% CI 0.03–0.3). (See ESM addendum 11.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

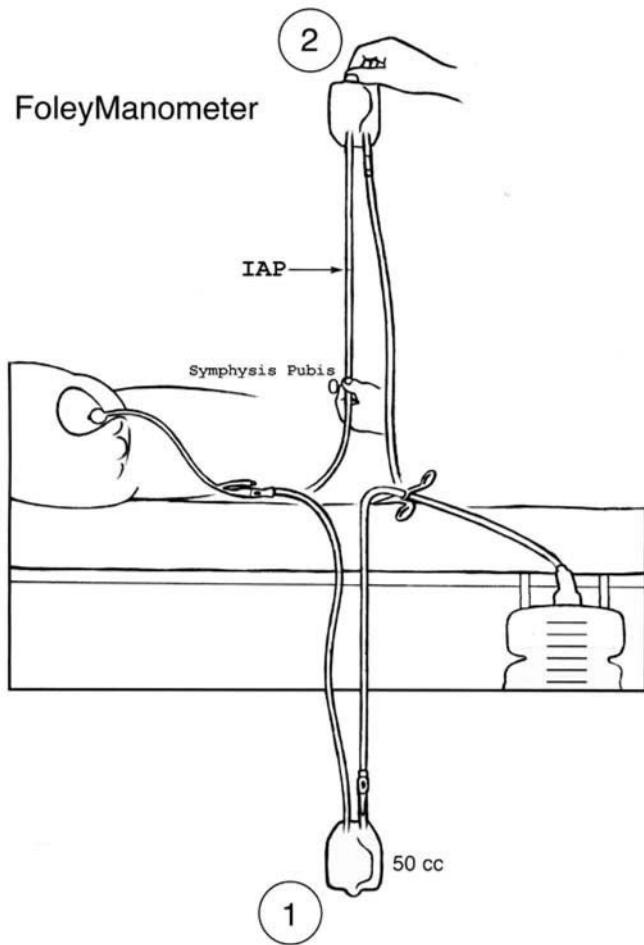
It has the same inconveniences and advantages as the other manometry techniques. It allows repeated measurements, is very cost-effective and fast, with minimal manipulation. The great advantage with the Foleymanometer is that the volume re-instilled into the bladder is standardised at 50 ml; therefore, it is preferred over the other manometry techniques. A major drawback is the possibility of occasional blocking of the bio-filter, leading to overestimation of IAP in some cases and the presence of air-bubbles in the manometer tube, producing multiple menisci leading to misinterpretation of IAP. Further refinement and multicentric validation needs to be done before being used in a clinical setting.

## Conclusion

The manometry techniques give a rapid and cost-effective idea of the magnitude of IAP and may be as accurate as other direct and indirect techniques. They can easily be done two-hourly together with and without interfering with urine output measurements. Moreover, the risk of infection and needle stick injury is absent. Since they need to be validated in a multicentre setting they are not ready for general clinical usage at the present moment.



Panel B



**Fig. 9** **A** The Holtech Foleymanometer: second prototype consists of a 50 ml container fitted with a bio-filter for venting inserted between the Foley catheter and the drainage bag. **B** The use of the Holtech Foleymanometer: schematic drawing. The container fills with urine during drainage (position 1); when the container is elevated (position 2), the 50 ml of urine flows back into the patient's bladder, and IAP can be read from the position of the meniscus in the clear manometer tube between the container and the Foley catheter

## Rectal pressure

### Description

Rectal pressures are used routinely as estimate for IAP during urodynamic studies to calculate the transmural detrusor muscle pressure as IVP minus IAP [29, 30]. Rectal pressures can be obtained by means of an open rectal catheter with a continuous slow irrigation (1 ml/min), but special fluid-filled balloon catheters are used more routinely, although are more expensive. (See ESM addendum 12.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

The major problem with the open catheter is that residual faecal mass can block the catheter-tip opening leading to overestimation of IAP. Other disadvantages of this technique are that it is more difficult, implicates more manipulation, is intermittent, and cannot be used in patients with lower gastro-intestinal bleeding or profound diarrhoea. There is also a great reluctance among nurses to use it. Since it is fluid-filled, it has all the problems associated with a hydrostatic fluid column, but since it is needle-free it decreases patient and healthcare worker infections or injuries. The fluid-filled balloon catheters are more expensive and, even though could theoretically stay in place for a longer period of time, interfere with gastro-intestinal transit and can cause erosions and even necrosis of the anal sphincter and rectal ampulla. Finally these techniques have not been validated in the ICU setting. This technique has no clinical implications in the ICU setting.

## Uterine pressure

### Description

Basically this technique is mostly done with the same catheters as for the rectal route. Uterine pressures are used routinely by gynaecologists during pregnancy and labour. Most classically a standard so-called "intra-uterine pressure catheter" (IUPC) is used for this purpose [31]. Uterine pressures are mostly obtained by means of a closed special fluid-filled balloon catheter (as for rectal pressure). (See ESM addendum 12.)

### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

The major disadvantages of this technique are the same as for rectal pressures: i.e. it is more difficult, implicates more manipulation, is intermittent, and cannot be used on patients with gynaecological bleeding or infection. Since it is also fluid-filled it has all the problems associated with

a hydrostatic fluid column, but is needle-free. Finally, this technique has not been validated in specific ICU patient populations. This technique has no clinical implications in the ICU setting.

### **Inferior vena cava pressure**

#### Description

The inferior vena cava pressure (IVCP) has been suggested as an estimation for IAP. Basically it uses the same techniques as described previously but applied to an IVC catheter. A normal central venous line is inserted into the inferior vena cava via the left or right femoral vein. The intra-abdominal position of the catheter is confirmed by portable lower abdomen X-ray, and confirmation of a rise in IAP following external abdominal pressure. A three-way stopcock is connected to the distal lumen, one end is connected to a pressure transducer via arterial tubing and the other end is connected to a pressurized infusion bag of 1,000 ml saline. The transducer is zeroed at the midaxillary line with the patient in the supine position and IAP is read end-expiratory as with CVP.

#### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

The major disadvantage of this technique is the risk of (possible catheter-related) bloodstream infections and septic shock. The initial placement is more time-consuming. It has also the problems inherent to fluid-filled systems and poses potential injury to the patient and healthcare workers. The major advantages are that a continuous trend can be obtained, it does not interfere with urine output, and it could be used in bladder-trauma patients. Finally this technique has not been validated in specific ICU patient populations. In an animal study comparing different methods of indirect IAP measurement, Lacey and co-workers found a good correlation between bladder and inferior vena cava pressure with direct intraperitoneal IAP measurement, but not with gastric, femoral or rectal pressure [29]. Lee and co-workers also found a good correlation in 30 patients during laparoscopy [27]. A recent study in man, comparing superior vena cava pressure (SVCP) with common iliac venous pressure (CIVP) in various conditions of IAP and PEEP showed that the difference between CIVP and SVCP was not affected by the IAP, which implies that CIVP does not reflect IAP correctly [32]. The most likely explanation is the differing anatomy and experimental model used to induce increased IAP in canine studies. In humans both CVIP and SVCP increase as IAP increases [32]. Recently, Joynt and co-workers also found a good correlation between SVCP and IVCP regardless of IAH [33]. This technique has limited implications in the ICU setting.

### **Microchip transducer-tipped catheters**

#### Description

Different types of catheters tipped with microchip transducers are nowadays available on the market. They can either be placed via the rectal, uterine, vesical or gastric route. These catheters can either have a 360° membrane pressor sensor in the organ (rectum, uterus, bladder, stomach) connected to an external transducer in a reusable cable or they can have a fibre-optic in vivo pressure transducer in the tip of the catheter itself. These catheters provide true zero in-situ calibration. By disconnecting and checking for zero on the monitor, clinicians can instantly validate and check the zero status of the monitor and the transducer [31]. Recently, Schachtrupp and co-workers found a good correlation between IAP calculated by a piezoresistive pressure measurement and direct insufflator pressure ( $R^2=0.92$ ), with a difference of  $1.6\pm4.8$  mmHg; however, the limits of agreement were large (-8 to 11.2 mmHg) [24]. This might have been due to an unknown measurement drift due to the fact that the device cannot be zeroed to the environment when placed intra-abdominally. (See ESM addendum 13.)

#### Advantages and disadvantages (Table 1)

The major disadvantages of this technique is that it is very expensive, with catheter-price ranging from €1,000 to €1,500. These catheters are said to be re-usable a couple of times after cleaning with soap and water and gas sterilisation, but no data on ICU patients are available. These catheters are mostly used during urodynamic studies and labour for a limited period of time (hours); none of them have been tested in ICU patients for longer periods of time (days to weeks). The major advantages are that a continuous trend can be obtained, it is less time-consuming, and it does not interfere with urine output. This technique has no clinical implications in the ICU setting.

### **Reproducibility of IAP measurement**

As stated previously, the intra-vesical route evolved as the gold standard. However, considerable variability in the measurement technique has been noted and the common pitfalls are briefly addressed below.

1. Malpositioning of the pressure transducer with regard to the symphysis pubis after repositioning of the patient. This may lead to over- and underestimation of IAP, which is commonly seen at changes of nurse shifts.
2. All fluid-filled systems connected to a pressure transducer have their own dynamic response properties

- that can create distortions or artefacts in the IAP pressure waveform, leading to signal over- or under-damping [14, 15].
3. It is the most used and validated technique, but with inadequate accuracy and reproducibility. The inaccuracy can come from the presence of air-bubbles in any fluid-filled system leading to over- or underestimation. If the measurement itself is inaccurate, this also implies that it is not reproducible. However, when the pressure transducer position is consistently too high or too low with a fully compliant transducer system of high intrinsic resonant frequency the IAP value obtained will be too low or too high, respectively, but may be reproducible. In order to get an idea of these reproducibility problems with bladder pressure we performed a multicentre snapshot study (four IAP measurements each every 6 h) on a given day [4]. The mean IAP was  $10.2 \pm 2.7$  mmHg, (range  $7.6 \pm 4$  to  $12.7 \pm 5.7$ ). Analysis according to Bland and Altman showed a global bias of IAP within 24 h (difference between minimum and maximum value) of  $5.1 \pm 3.8$  (SD) mmHg (95% CI 4.3–5.9); the limits of agreement were –2.5 to 12.7 mmHg. The bias differed from centre to centre between 2.4 and 6.2 mmHg, with one outlier bias value as high as 11 mmHg, raising questions as to the reproducibility of the measurement technique used in that centre and making it difficult to compare literature data [4]. The mean coefficient of variation (defined as the standard deviation divided by the mean IAP) was 25%, which is comparable to daily fluctuations in other pressures, like central venous pressure or pulmonary artery occlusion pressure. However, this coefficient ranged from 4% to 66% between centres. Since the literature provides no data on 24-h continuous IAP-measurement in the ICU, it is not possible to determine whether these variations or fluctuations in IAP during one study day were normal or related to the measurement technique used.
  4. The bladder “gold standard” measurement techniques reported are not uniform; most authors recommend to inject 50 ml [1, 2], others 0 ml [16], 100 ml [13, 23], 200 ml (data from internet: Brenda Morgan, Clinical Educator, CCTC on <http://critcare.lhsc.on.ca/education/abdcpt.html>, last revised 2001) or even 250 ml [17] of saline into the bladder. In fact, in the initial article from Iberti and co-workers, data are presented from a canine model without stating the volume instilled in the bladder. The only statement was that “the bladder was continuously emptied between measurements” [16]. In a following study, Iberti and co-workers presented human data stating, “using a sterile technique an average of 250 ml of normal saline was infused through the urinary catheter to gently fill the bladder and eliminate air in the drainage catheter” [17].
  5. Conflicting results are reported in the literature regarding the validation of IVP versus directly measured IAP during laparoscopy. In a recent study, Yol and co-workers compared bladder pressure with direct insufflation pressure during laparoscopic cholecystectomy in 40 patients and he found a very good correlation between the two measurements ( $R=0.973$ ,  $P<0.0001$ ) [32]. This was also shown by Fusco and co-workers, who compared direct laparoscopic insufflation pressure with bladder pressures measured with bladder volumes of 0, 50, 150 and 200 ml [5]. He found that there was a good correlation across the IAP range from 0 to 25 mmHg between direct and indirect methods with all tested volumes. A bladder volume of 0 ml demonstrated the lowest bias, but when considering only elevated IAPs (25 mmHg) a bladder volume of 50 ml revealed the lowest bias. He concluded that intravesicular pressure closely approximates IAP and that instilling 50 ml of saline improved the accuracy of the bladder pressure in measuring elevated IAPs. However Johna and co-workers recently found that intravesicular pressure did not reflect actual intra-abdominal insufflation pressure (limited up to 15 mmHg) during laparoscopy [34]. He concluded that further research is needed to identify possible variables that may play a role in the relationship between the urinary bladder and abdominal cavity pressures, providing better means for diagnosing ACS. Further reading shows that the methodology of this study was poor.
  6. Although many articles have validated IVP against direct insufflation pressures, it is difficult to extrapolate these single observer comparisons in patients undergoing general anesthesia and paralysis to a mixed ICU population of patients not under muscle relaxation as well as subject to other confounding factors (nurse shifts, position, zero reference, etc.). Direct IAP measurement via a laparoscopic insufflator is prone to errors by flow dynamics, resulting in rapid increases in pressure during insufflation. The Verres needle opening can be blocked by tissue or fluid leading to over- or underestimation of IAP and pressures can be influenced by muscle relaxation. Laparoscopy remains an artificial environment, this makes it even more difficult to validate indirect IAP measurement methods.
  7. Baseline IAP and the volume instilled in the bladder are important. Gudmundsson and co-workers found recently in an animal study that the IAP increase by instilling Ringer’s solution into the abdominal cavity correlated well with intra-vesical pressures [6]. It was also found that IVP as an estimation for IAP is affected by the amount of fluid in the bladder that should not exceed 10–15 ml. If the baseline IAP is lower than 8 mmHg, a 131-ml extra bladder volume is needed to increase IAP by 2 mmHg; however, if baseline IAP is 20 mmHg, only 39-ml extra bladder volume is needed for the same IAP increase [6]. We recently came to the same conclusions: by analysing bladder pressure

volume curves we found that IVP significantly increased depending on the volume instilled. The IVP rose from  $4.2 \pm 3.2$  mmHg at the baseline to  $6.9 \pm 5$  mm Hg with 50 ml and  $23.7 \pm 16.1$  at 300 ml ( $P < 0.0001$ , ANOVA) [7]. If IVP is used as an estimate for IAP, the volume instilled in the bladder should be between 50 and 100 ml; however, in some patients with a low bladder compliance IVP can be raised at low bladder volumes. Ideally a bladder PV curve should be constructed for each individual patient before using IVP as an estimation for IAP. This study makes it difficult to compare the literature data. It raises not only questions with regard to the previously published definitions and IAP cut-offs, but it also puts the IVP in question as the so-called gold standard. Ideally the bladder should be fully emptied before an IAP measurement, but how can you be really sure?

8. Body position is important. Putting a patient in different body positions has significant effects on IAP (Fig. 10). This is in contradiction with the hypothesis that the abdominal compartment is primarily fluid in character and should follow the law of Pascal, since IAP would then remain constant regardless of body position as fluid is not compressible. The abdomen should in fact be looked at as a "fluidlike" compartment with different components that may influence IVP (the intrinsic weight of the organs, the presence of ascites, the air in the bowel, etc.). Assessment of IAP should, therefore, always be done in the complete supine position. The upright position significantly increases IAP compared with the supine. The effects on IAP being more pronounced in obese patients [35].

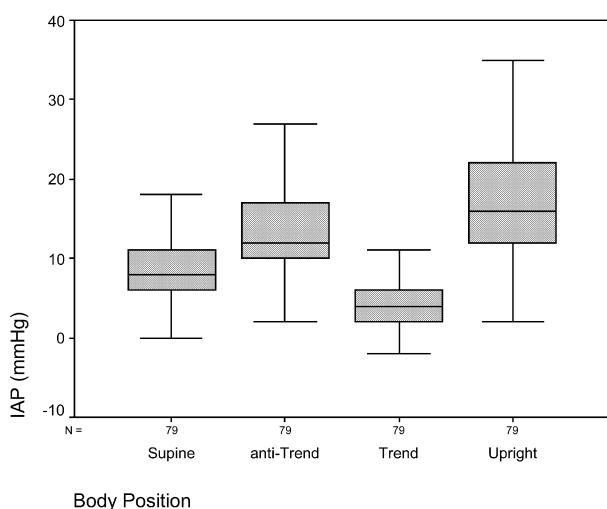
Many of these drawbacks are not only true for the bladder but are also present when IAP is estimated via other routes. Not much has been studied on the effects of spontaneous breathing, mechanical ventilation, the presence of expiratory muscle activity, auto-PEEP, and curarisation on IAP measurement via the different routes.

Definitions for IAH and ACS stand or fall by the correct measurement of IAP and its reproducibility. Recent literature data put the bladder pressure in question as the so-called gold standard for abdominal pressure [5, 6, 34–36].

## Conclusion

This review has undertaken an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages, as well as a cost projection, for each IAP measurement technique and supports the view that: (1) there is no gold standard; (2) it is difficult to compare the different techniques; (3) cost-effectiveness is an issue; (4) IVP can be used as an estimation for IAP as a screening method to identify patients at risk via manometry; (5) IVP can be used as an estimation for IAP for initial follow-up either with the Cheatham or revised bladder technique; (6) for (multicentre) study purposes, surgical patients, trauma patients, patients at risk for IAH and difficult ICU patients, like mechanically ventilated patients with one or more other organ failures (assessed by SOFA score), it is preferable to switch to a continuous method for IAP monitoring via the stomach and focus therapy on optimising IAP and APP.

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**Fig. 10** Boxplot of mean IAP values in different body positions. The IAP was significantly higher in the anti-Trendelenburg and upright position versus the supine, and significantly lower in the Trendelenburg position versus the supine ( $P < 0.0001$ , one-way Anova)

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## Tissue capnometry: does the answer lie under the tongue?

**Abstract** Increases in tissue partial pressure of carbon dioxide ( $\text{PCO}_2$ ) can reflect an abnormal oxygen supply to the cells, so that monitoring tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  may help identify circulatory abnormalities and guide their correction. Gastric tonometry aims at monitoring regional  $\text{PCO}_2$  in the stomach, an easily accessible organ that becomes ischemic quite early when the circulatory status is jeopardized. Despite substantial initial enthusiasm, this technique has never been widely implemented due to various technical problems and artifacts during measurement. Experimental studies have suggested that sublingual  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $P_{\text{sl}}\text{CO}_2$ ) is a reli-

able marker of tissue perfusion. Clinical studies have demonstrated that high  $P_{\text{sl}}\text{CO}_2$  values and, especially, high gradients between  $P_{\text{sl}}\text{CO}_2$  and arterial  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $\Delta P_{\text{sl-a}}\text{CO}_2$ ) are associated with impaired microcirculatory blood flow and a worse prognosis in critically ill patients. Although some questions remain to be answered about sublingual capnometry and its utility, this technique could offer new hope for tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  monitoring in clinical practice.

**Keywords** Sublingual capnometry · Gastric tonometry · Tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  · Microvascular blood flow · Outcome · Critically ill patients

### Introduction

Tissue hypoperfusion is a common pathophysiological process leading to multiple organ dysfunction and death [1–4]. The major objectives in the management of acutely ill patients are to prevent, detect and correct tissue dysoxia as soon as possible to minimize organ damage [5]. Unfortunately, none of the currently available monitoring systems are very reliable at the bedside. Systemic hemodynamic and oxygenation parameters lack sensitivity and specificity [5–7], especially in sepsis [8, 9].

The possibility of detecting early signs of tissue hypoperfusion by regional monitoring led to a great interest in gastric tonometry. However, much of the enthusiasm was tempered by technical or artifactual problems and difficulties in demonstrating the utility of gastric tonometry-derived variables as therapeutic guides. Sublingual capnometry has emerged in recent years as a potential alternative to monitoring tissue perfusion without some of

the shortcomings that preclude the widespread use of gastric tonometry.

Here we review current knowledge about sublingual capnometry, its applicability and its limitations, as a technique to evaluate organ perfusion in acutely ill patients.

### The saga of gastric tonometry

Current hemodynamic monitoring techniques, including the pulmonary artery catheter, are quite invasive and carry a risk of complications [10, 11] and higher costs [12], with controversial benefit [13, 14]. The measurement of arterial lactate concentrations may not reflect early alterations and have their own limitations [7, 15, 16].

Gastric tonometry has raised a lot of interest [17, 18] based on three important concepts: (a) tissue hypercarbia is a marker of mismatch between blood flow and oxygen demand [19]; (b) introduction of a gastric tube is a

common procedure in acutely ill patients and (c) the gut mucosa is exquisitely susceptible to hypoperfusion [20]. A number of studies have indicated that gastric tonometry-derived variables have prognostic value [9, 21, 22]. Changes in gastric mucosal  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $P_g\text{CO}_2$ ) may precede alterations in systemic variables [23–25] and the  $\text{PCO}_2$  gap (the difference between  $P_g\text{CO}_2$  and arterial  $\text{PCO}_2$ ) may represent a valuable monitoring system [21, 22, 26].

Unfortunately, gastric tonometry has serious limitations, even after the advent of gas tonometry [27, 28], including interruption of enteral feeding and concomitant use of  $\text{H}_2$ -blockers [28]. All these drawbacks reduce the clinical utility of the stomach as a practical place for routine tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  measurement.

### **Physiological concepts to interpret tissue partial pressure of carbon dioxide**

Blood flow as the main determinant of tissue carbon dioxide content ( $\text{CCO}_2$ )

Tissue  $\text{CCO}_2$  is determined by three variables: arterial  $\text{CCO}_2$  ( $C_a\text{CO}_2$ ), regional blood flow and tissue  $\text{CO}_2$  production (aerobic or anaerobic). In stable respiratory conditions when  $C_a\text{CO}_2$  is constant, tissue  $\text{CCO}_2$  reflects the balance between tissue blood flow and local  $\text{CO}_2$  production. In low flow states,  $\text{CCO}_2$  increases as a result of the “ $\text{CO}_2$  stagnation phenomenon” [29], even in the absence of dysoxia. Studies comparing ischemic and hypoxic hypoxia in animal models [30, 31] have demonstrated that the reduction in blood flow is the main determinant of tissue  $\text{CO}_2$  accumulation, since even in severe dysoxic conditions induced by pure hypoxic hypoxia (a condition in which blood flow is maintained),  $\text{CO}_2$  accumulation has not occurred [31]. However, while mechanistically interesting, the hypoxic hypoxia model is not clinically relevant.

Aerobic and anaerobic production of carbon dioxide

Carbon dioxide production occurs in both aerobic and anaerobic situations [32–35]. Increases in aerobic metabolism are associated with higher  $\text{CO}_2$  production by the cells, which is generally associated with parallel increases in blood flow, so that tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  does not increase (“washout phenomenon”). When oxygen delivery decreases and reaches a critical value, aerobiosis can no longer be sustained and anaerobic production of  $\text{CO}_2$  by the cells increases as a result of buffering of excess protons by bicarbonate ions and decarboxylation of metabolic intermediates [36]. However, during tissue dysoxia, total  $\text{CO}_2$  production may be decreased [37–39] because the fall in aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production can be greater than the increase in anaerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production. In fact, a distinc-

tion between aerobic and anaerobic production of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the body is quite difficult [32].

### **Carbon dioxide content-partial pressure of carbon dioxide relationship**

The relation between  $\text{CCO}_2$  and  $\text{PCO}_2$  follows a curvilinear shape so that changes in  $\text{PCO}_2$  are not always associated with similar changes in  $\text{CCO}_2$ . Some physiological variables can also interfere with this relationship, such as hemoglobin concentration and its oxygen saturation [40], pH and temperature: none of which are of established clinical significance [41, 42].

### **Monitoring tissue partial pressure of carbon dioxide in sites other than the stomach**

Tissue hypercapnia is ubiquitous in shock states. The methodological limitations of gastric tonometry prompted a search for alternative sites of tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  monitoring. Walley et al. [43] proposed, in an experimental model of hemorrhagic shock in pigs, that small bowel (jejunum) tonometry is more accurate than gastric tonometry in detecting gut ischemia, and sigmoid tonometry has been studied as a surrogate monitor of gastrointestinal ischemia, especially useful in aorto-iliac surgery—in which left ischemic colitis is a well known complication [44–46]. Sato et al. [47] demonstrated, in a rodent model of hemorrhagic shock, that the esophagus luminal  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $P_e\text{CO}_2$ ) was a reliable surrogate for the  $P_g\text{CO}_2$ .

In addition to the gastrointestinal tract, experimental studies have used tonometry to detect hypoperfusion in other places in the body including the brain [48], bladder [49], muscle [50] and peritoneum [51]. However, these sites are not practical for routine use and, in the search for a place in the body where tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  could be easily and rapidly measured in a non-invasive and more practical way, Nakagawa et al. [52] suggested that the sublingual mucosa could be a valuable site.

### **Relevant aspects of sublingual anatomy and physiology**

The sublingual mucosa is a highly vascularized surface supplied by the sublingual arteries, which stem from the lingual arteries, branches of the external carotid arteries. Indeed, in addition to the esophagus, the sublingual region is not part of the splanchnic area. However, alterations in sublingual blood flow may occur in response to feeding, with increased production of saliva by sublingual glands. This process is mediated mainly by the parasympathetic nervous system in response to many factors, including

direct tactile stimulus and as a reflex response to the presence of food in the stomach or proximal intestine.

### **Sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide measurement**

Experimental and clinical studies regarding sublingual capnometry have used essentially two different devices: MI-720 CO<sub>2</sub> electrode (Microelectrodes; Londonderry, NH, USA) and CapnoProbe SL Monitoring System (Nellcor; Pleasanton, CA, USA).

MI-720 is a CO<sub>2</sub> electrode that needs to be calibrated in standard gases with known percent values of CO<sub>2</sub> before use. Although not originally designed to be used under the tongue, it is the device that has been used in most relevant experimental studies regarding P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> measurement [52–54] and also in the first clinical study reported [55]. Weil et al. [55] made some modifications to the device in such a way that it fits better in the human sublingual space and avoids contact with room air, which can interfere badly with measurements.

The CapnoProbe was specially designed for the measurement of P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> and has been used in most of the clinical studies on this subject [7, 56, 57]. It consists of a disposable P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> sensor, which is actually a CO<sub>2</sub>-sensing optode. The optode comprises a CO<sub>2</sub>-permeable silicone capsule filled with a fluorescent dye in a buffer solution, at the distal end of an optical fiber. The fluorescent indicator is excited by light conducted through the optical fiber and changes in the projected light caused by changes in fluorescent emission are monitored by the optical fiber. These changes occur as a consequence of parallel changes in the pH of the solution, which is a result of the presence of CO<sub>2</sub> and formation of carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>). Light signals are then transferred via the optical fiber to an instrument where they are converted to a numerical value of PCO<sub>2</sub>. If properly placed under the tongue with the mouth shut, exposure to the environmental air and light is minimal. A few minutes are necessary for calibration and equilibration, which are made in a liquid solution with a known concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>. The capability range of measurement with this device is from 30 to 150 mmHg.

### **Current experience with sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide measurement**

#### **Experimental studies**

The first evidence that sublingual capnometry may be useful in the diagnosis and quantitation of circulatory shock came from the work of Nakagawa et al. [52]. These investigators observed, during hemorrhagic and septic shock in rats, that changes in P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> were parallel to changes in P<sub>g</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> and systemic markers of hypoperfu-

sion, such as mean arterial pressure, cardiac index and arterial lactate concentration. It is important to note that the septic shock model used in this study was characterized by a hypodynamic status.

Povoas et al. [53] demonstrated similar phenomena in pigs during bleeding and re-infusion, with a close correlation between P<sub>g</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> and P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> values. In another study in rats [58], hemorrhage resulted in a decrease in blood flow in several organs, including the sublingual region, and these decreases were associated with simultaneous increases in P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>.

As with gut mucosal PCO<sub>2</sub> [59–62], arterial PCO<sub>2</sub> (P<sub>a</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>) also influences P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>. Pernat et al. [54] showed that acute changes in P<sub>a</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> induced by hypo- and hyperventilation in rats influence P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> under physiological conditions and during hemorrhagic shock. Hence, changes in P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> should be interpreted in relation to the concurrent P<sub>a</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>; the gradient ( $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ ) rather than P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> per se must be considered.

#### **Clinical studies**

Four clinical studies using sublingual capnometry in critically ill patients have been reported [7, 55–57] (Table 1). Weil et al. [55] reported the first clinical, prospective investigation on sublingual capnometry. These authors measured P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> and simultaneous values of arterial blood pressure, heart rate and arterial lactate concentrations in 46 patients admitted to the emergency room, intensive care unit (ICU) or trauma service with life-threatening illness or injuries, 26 of whom were considered to be in shock on the basis of a systolic pressure less than 100 mmHg and physical signs of circulatory failure at the time of admission. The authors found higher P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> values in the shock group and suggested that a P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> threshold value of 70 mmHg was predictive of the severity of the circulatory failure and the likelihood of hospital survival. Initial P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> values were highly correlated with arterial lactate concentrations but decreased more promptly during effective treatment, suggesting that decreases in P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> occur faster and closer to the real time of hemodynamic improvement than arterial lactate concentrations. They concluded that sublingual capnometry was a reliable method for diagnosis and quantitation of severity of circulatory failure in humans.

Marik [56] also measured P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> in hemodynamically unstable patients during the first 24 h of ICU admission. Initial  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  values were statistically higher in non-survivors than in survivors but the P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> values were not, suggesting that  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  is a better prognostic factor than P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub>. In a similar study design, Rackow and co-workers [57] also found higher  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  in non-survivors than in survivors, but this time measured at 24 h after the start of the study. These authors observed that the correlation between P<sub>sl</sub>CO<sub>2</sub> and the other indexes of tissue

**Table 1** Summary of clinical studies using sublingual capnometry

Author(s)/year	Number of patients	Diagnosis	Time of $P_{sl}CO_2$ measurement	$P_{sl}CO_2/\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ survivors, non-survivors	<i>p</i> value
Weil et al, 1999 [55]	46	21 trauma 14 infection 6 cardiac emergency 5 miscellaneous	ICU, ER or TS admission, every 30 min, (total 6 h)	$P_{sl}CO_2$ (admission), 58.4±11.3, 92.6±26.6	<0.001
Marik, 2001 [56]	22	15 severe sepsis/septic shock 7 cardiogenic shock	ICU admission, every 4–6 h, (total 24 h)	$\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ (admission), 9.2±5.0, 17.8±11.5	0.04
Rackow et al, 2001 [57]	25	19 sepsis 6 cardiac failure	0, 1, 3, 6, 12, 24 h after Swan-Ganz insertion	$\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ (at 24 h), 14±3, 29±4	<0.05
Marik and Bankov, 2003 [7]	54	21 severe sepsis/septic shock 9 cardiogenic shock 8 major abdominal surgery 8 polytrauma 5 hypovolemic shock 3 severe pancreatitis	0, 4, 8 h after Swan-Ganz insertion	$\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ (at the time of Swan-Ganz insertion), 19.0±12.8, 35.3±18.3	0.0004

$P_{sl}CO_2$  sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide,  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  sublingual-arterial partial pressure of carbon dioxide gradient, *ICU* intensive care unit, *ER* emergency room, *TS* trauma service

**Table 2** Well-established facts, limitations and unanswered questions about sublingual capnometry

Well-established facts	1. $P_{sl}CO_2$ depends on $P_aCO_2$ , sublingual tissue CO <sub>2</sub> production and regional blood flow 2. Low blood flow is the main determinant of CO <sub>2</sub> accumulation in tissues 3. Measurement of $P_{sl}CO_2$ is non-invasive and easily obtained in cooperative or sedated patients 4. High $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ values in critically ill patients predict a poor prognosis
Limitations and questions to be answered	1. Current physiological concepts preclude $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ as a sensitive and specific marker of dysoxia 2. Possible differences in $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ patterns in hypodynamic and hyperdynamic shock 3. Cut-off values between normal and pathological values are hard to define 4. $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ -guided therapy has not yet been shown to be beneficial

$P_{sl}CO_2$  sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide,  $P_aCO_2$  arterial partial pressure of carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub> carbon dioxide,  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  gradient between  $P_{sl}CO_2$  and  $P_aCO_2$

perfusion was greater in patients with cardiac failure than with sepsis. Marik and Bankov [7] recently confirmed that  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  is a good outcome predictor. They observed that patients with an initial  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  higher than 25 mmHg have a high mortality rate. In their study, despite optimization of traditional hemodynamic end points, the  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  decreased but remained higher in the non-survivors than in the survivors. When they excluded  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  from the analysis,  $P_{sl}CO_2$  became the most significant predictor of outcome by multivariate analysis. Based on this, they concluded that, in their study,  $P_{sl}CO_2$  alone might be suitable for management, obviating the need for blood gas analysis to calculate  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ .

By simultaneously monitoring  $P_{sl}CO_2$  with Capno-Probe and sublingual microcirculation with the use of the Orthogonal Polarization Spectral imaging technique (Cytoscan, Cytometrics, Philadelphia, PA, USA), our group was able to demonstrate a significant correlation between  $P_{sl}CO_2$  and the percentage of perfused sublingual capillaries in 12 septic shock patients [63, 64]. Hence,

$\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  seems to be mainly determined by sublingual microcirculatory blood flow.

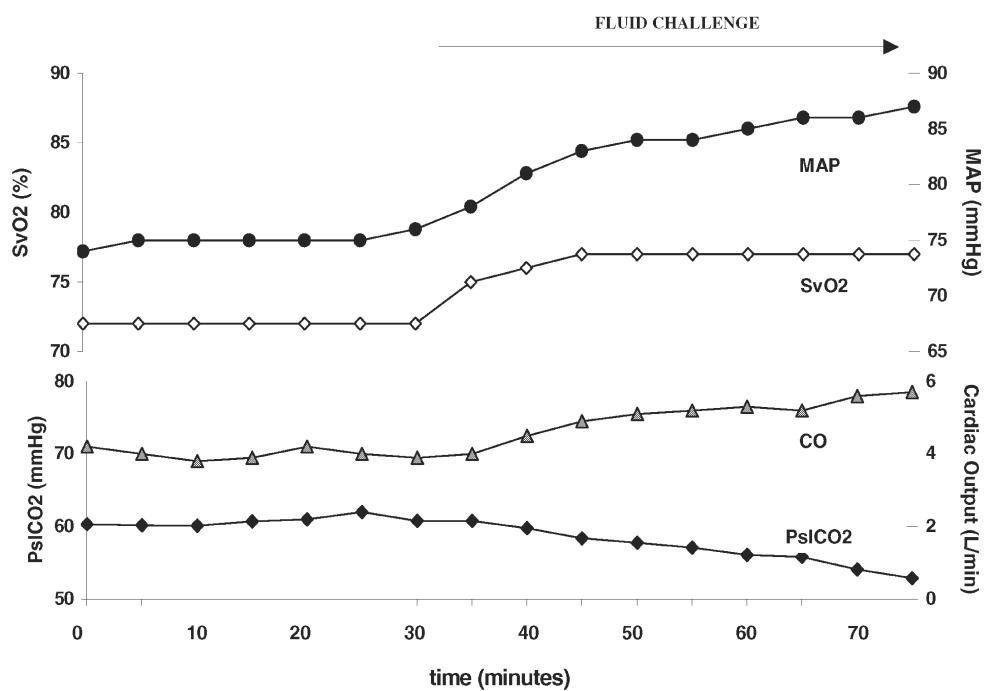
### Limitations, controversies and unanswered questions

With the currently available data on sublingual capnometry, some questions (Table 2) remain and need proper evaluation and consideration.

Drawbacks of tissue partial pressure of carbon dioxide measurement in the sublingual mucosa

Although more practical than the stomach for measurement of tissue PCO<sub>2</sub>, some potential disadvantages need to be discussed. First, since tactile stimuli can increase sublingual blood flow and production of saliva, the presence of the device itself under the tongue can increase sublingual blood flow. Most acutely ill patients are not

**Fig. 1** Results from a 73-year-old woman admitted to the ICU with subarachnoid hemorrhage. Cardiac output was felt to be inadequate in the presence of an increased arterial lactate concentration and a high  $P_{sl}CO_2$  (around 60 mmHg). Mean arterial pressure (MAP), cardiac output (CO), mixed venous oxygen saturation ( $SvO_2$ ) and sublingual  $PCO_2$  ( $P_{sl}CO_2$ ) were continuously monitored. A fluid challenge resulted in increases in MAP, CO, and  $SvO_2$  and decreases in  $P_{sl}CO_2$ . Since arterial  $PCO_2$  remained constant (38 mmHg), decreases in the sublingual-arterial  $PCO_2$  gradient ( $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ ) were equally significant. Arterial lactate concentration normalized in the subsequent hours



fed orally so that the direct interference of food on sublingual measurement is not a major problem, as it is for gastric tonometry. However, enteral feeding could theoretically interfere indirectly with sublingual blood flow through reflex mechanisms, as previously mentioned. It is important to remember that the sublingual mucosa is sometimes used for drug administration but this should be avoided during sublingual  $PCO_2$  monitoring. In addition,  $CO_2$  production by bacteria of the oral flora and interference of saliva and its composition as well as vomitus in the measurement of the  $P_{sl}CO_2$  value are potential areas of concern, but their effects are probably negligible.

The devices clinically available for  $P_{sl}CO_2$  measurement measure the value intermittently. However, since  $P_{sl}CO_2$  seems to respond fast to changes in hemodynamic conditions, intermittent measurements are not very practical for use in critically ill patients. For this reason, a system that measures  $P_{sl}CO_2$  continuously would be more appropriate. This system has already been developed (CapnoProbe SL Model 2000 Sensor; Optical Sensor, MN, USA) but is still not clinically available. Fig. 1 shows an example of the use of this device in a single patient.

Another important aspect of the measurement of tissue  $PCO_2$  in the sublingual mucosa is that, since it is not part of the splanchnic area, elevations in  $P_{sl}CO_2$  may not occur as fast as in the stomach in progressive shock states. Hence, it may not serve as a "canary of the body" [65]. In addition,  $P_{sl}CO_2$  should always be interpreted in relation to the arterial  $PCO_2$ . This latter measurement is subject to bias and imprecisions related to blood gas sampling and

analysis, including the pitfalls of the temperature correction of blood gases. Since sublingual and arterial  $PCO_2$  are measured by different equipment and at different temperatures, a methodological error may be introduced [66].

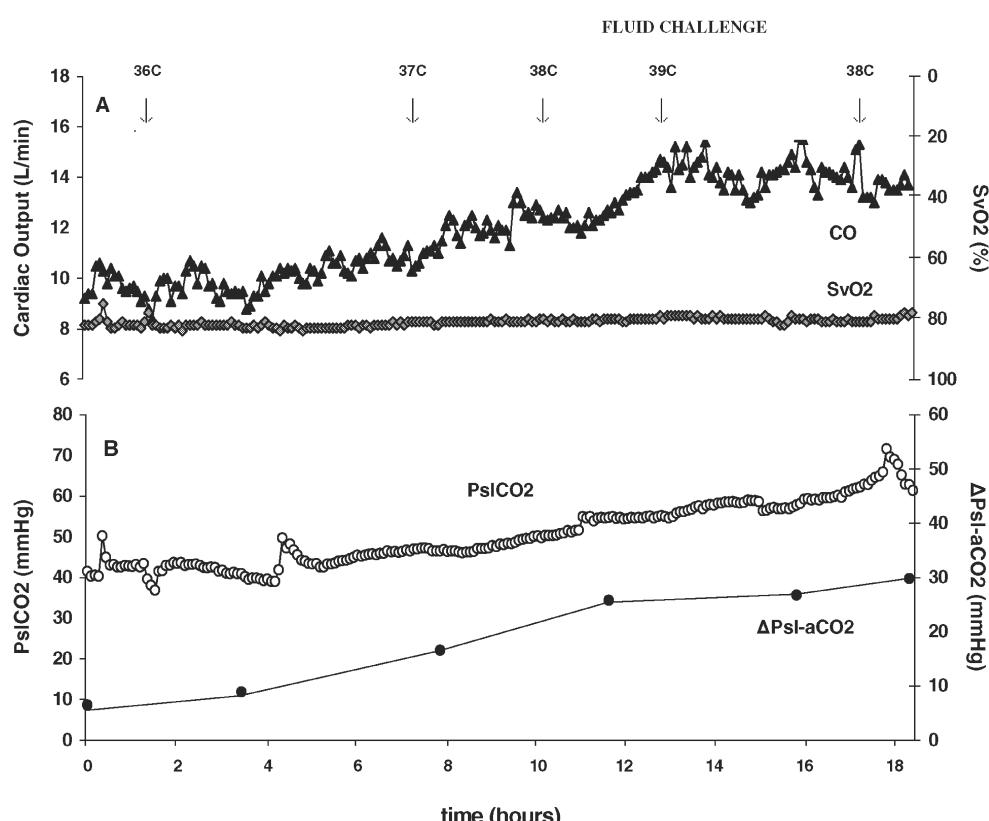
#### Normal values of sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide

There is no large study evaluating the normal value of  $P_{sl}CO_2$ . Weil et al. [55] measured  $P_{sl}CO_2$  in five healthy human volunteers with the MI-720  $CO_2$  electrode and the range was from 43 to 47 mmHg.

#### Sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide measurement in different types of shock

Most experimental studies on sublingual capnometry have included hypodynamic types of circulatory shock. Even in models of septic shock, the cardiac index started to fall at the beginning of the experiment [52]. This has been a limitation of models using a bolus intravenous injection of bacteria (or endotoxin) [67]. Most of the clinical studies did not evaluate different types of shock separately [7, 55, 56], yet it is possible that different types of shock modify  $P_{sl}CO_2$  values in different ways. This may also contribute to the variability in the correlations between  $P_{sl}CO_2$  and other markers of tissue perfusion in the various studies, as suggested by Rackow et al. [57].

**Fig. 2** Results from a 20-year-old man admitted to the ICU with fulminant hepatic failure and severe sepsis, showing a hyperdynamic status. **A** Cardiac output ( $CO$ ) and mixed venous oxygen saturation ( $SvO_2$ ) were recorded every 5 min. Note the progressive increase in  $CO$  and oral temperature (arrows) with a stable  $SvO_2$ . **B** Continuous sublingual  $PCO_2$  ( $P_{sl}CO_2$ ) monitoring and intermittent sublingual-arterial  $PCO_2$  gradient ( $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ ) measurement. Note that although  $CO$  increased,  $P_{sl}CO_2$  and  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  also increased. Arterial lactate concentration was around 2 mmol/l and mean arterial pressure around 65–70 mmHg (no vasoactive agent) throughout the monitoring period. The clinical condition deteriorated in the hours after the end of the monitoring period progressing to septic shock (fungal in origin) and multiple organ failure. The patient died 2 days later



What is the behavior of sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide in hyperdynamic sepsis?

We have reported high values of  $P_{sl}CO_2$  in hemodynamically stabilized septic shock patients [63, 64], even when cardiac output increased (Fig. 2). The most feasible explanation for increases in  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  despite increases in systemic blood flow is compromised microvascular blood flow in patients with sepsis [68–71], including in the sublingual mucosa [63, 72]. Low microvascular blood flow may occur despite high systemic blood flow due to shunts in “weak microcirculatory units” [73, 74] and this is mainly responsible for  $CO_2$  accumulation and increases in  $P_{sl}CO_2$  despite the presence of a high cardiac index. Distributive abnormalities of macrocirculatory and microcirculatory blood flow play a key role in the impairment of sepsis-related oxygen extraction [75] and, probably, also in tissue  $CO_2$  accumulation.  $P_{sl}CO_2$  seems to correlate well with the microcirculatory alterations reported in sepsis [63, 64], so it could be used as a reliable marker to quantify these alterations.

It is reasonable to speculate that in all types of shock, even in hyperdynamic sepsis, compromised blood flow and impairment in tissue perfusion are a common end point. Hence, tissue  $PCO_2$  is expected to increase in all these situations, whatever the etiology or mechanism. However, dysoxia may occur despite maintained blood

flow; adequate perfusion, although essential, is not always a guarantee of normal aerobic cell metabolism, especially in sepsis.

Should treatment be guided by gradients between sublingual partial pressure of carbon dioxide and arterial partial pressure of carbon dioxide?

No study exists on the efficacy of  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$ -guided therapy. A high value for  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  suggests a mismatch between blood flow (especially in the microcirculation) and oxygen demand in all types of shock, a situation that usually precedes the occurrence of dysoxia itself and multiple organ failure. However, care must be taken since the literature already has good examples of very promising monitoring techniques, such as pH<sub>i</sub> measurement, which, although useful as a prognostic index [76, 77], is still controversial as a therapeutic guide, having been shown to be beneficial in some studies [18, 78, 79], but not in others [80, 81]. Since interpretation of  $\Delta P_{sl-a}CO_2$  is not always easy to achieve, the best approach at this moment is to analyze its value in conjunction with the traditional hemodynamic parameters in current use.

## Conclusion

Sublingual capnometry has emerged in recent years as a promising technique for non-invasive monitoring of hemodynamic disturbances. Experimental and clinical studies have indicated that: (a) acute and severe reductions in blood flow are associated with significant  $\text{PCO}_2$  elevation in virtually all tissues; (b) sublingual tissue is a potential site for measurement of  $\text{PCO}_2$  non-invasively, which is the great advantage of this method; (c)  $\text{P}_a\text{CO}_2$  must be taken into account when interpreting  $P_{sl}\text{CO}_2$ ; (d) higher  $P_{sl}\text{CO}_2$  values and, more specifically, higher  $\Delta P_{sl-a}\text{CO}_2$  values correlate with altered sublingual microcirculatory blood flow and an increased risk of death in critically ill patients.

With our current knowledge, some questions and limitations are still present: (a) correct tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  in-

terpretation is not always easy to achieve since some variables can potentially interfere with the measurement, even when it is made in the sublingual mucosa; (b) the sublingual mucosa may not be as susceptible to ischemia as the gastrointestinal tract, so that it may not be compromised so early in progressive shock states; (c) there may be differences in  $P_{sl}\text{CO}_2$  kinetics in different types of shock; (d) the absence of a "gold standard" monitor of dysoxia to compare with; (e) no well-established normal and pathological  $\Delta P_{sl-a}\text{CO}_2$  values; and (f) it is still uncertain if correction of  $\Delta P_{sl-a}\text{CO}_2$  improves prognosis. Nevertheless, since  $P_{sl}\text{CO}_2$  measurement is technically simple and non-invasive, new studies should be encouraged to define the precise role of sublingual  $\text{PCO}_2$  measurement in the management of critically ill patients.

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## Noninvasive monitoring of peripheral perfusion

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**Abstract** *Background:* Early hemodynamic assessment of global parameters in critically ill patients fails to provide adequate information on tissue perfusion. It requires invasive monitoring and may represent a late intervention initiated mainly in the intensive care unit. Noninvasive monitoring of peripheral perfusion can be a complementary approach that allows very early application throughout the hospital. In addition, as peripheral tissues are sensitive to alterations in perfusion, monitoring of the periphery could be an early marker of tissue hypoperfusion. This review discusses noninvasive methods for monitoring perfusion in peripheral tissues based on clinical signs, body temperature gradient, optical monitoring, transcutaneous oximetry, and sublingual capnometry. *Discussion:* Clinical signs of poor peripheral perfusion consist of a cold, pale, clammy, and mottled skin, as-

sociated with an increase in capillary refill time. The temperature gradients peripheral-to-ambient, central-to-peripheral and forearm-to-fingertip skin are validated methods to estimate dynamic variations in skin blood flow. Commonly used optical methods for peripheral monitoring are perfusion index, near-infrared spectroscopy, laser Doppler flowmetry and orthogonal polarization spectroscopy. Continuous noninvasive transcutaneous measurement of oxygen and carbon dioxide tensions can be used to estimate cutaneous blood flow. Sublingual capnometry is a noninvasive alternative for gastric tonometry.

**Keywords** Body temperature gradient · Hemodynamic assessment · Noninvasive monitoring · Peripheral tissue perfusion · Sublingual capnometry · Transcutaneous oximetry

### Introduction

An important goal of hemodynamic monitoring is the early detection of inadequate tissue perfusion and oxygenation to institute prompt therapy and guide resuscitation, avoiding organ damage. In clinical practice tissue oxygenation is frequently assessed by using conventional global measurements such as blood pressure, oxygen derived variables, and blood lactate levels. However, the assessment of global hemodynamic parameters fails to reflect increased blood lactate levels, the imbalance between oxygen demand and oxygen supply, or the status of

the microcirculation [1, 2, 3]. In addition, it often requires invasive monitoring techniques that usually limit early initiation, typically after the patient has been admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU).

To address these limitations there have been many attempts to perform measurements of blood flow and oxygenation in peripheral tissues [4, 5]. In circulatory failure blood flow is diverted from the less important tissues (skin, subcutaneous, muscle, gastrointestinal tract) to vital organs (heart, brain, kidneys). Thus monitoring perfusion in these less vital tissues could be an early marker of vital tissue hypoperfusion. Second, the assess-

ment of perfusion in peripheral tissues is more easily obtainable using noninvasive monitoring techniques, thus facilitating earlier initiation.

Monitoring of peripheral perfusion and oxygenation does not need any intravascular catheter, transesophageal probe insertion, blood component analysis or penetration of the skin. Also, it can be performed directly (clinical evaluation and body temperature gradient) or by signal processing (optical monitoring; transcutaneous oximetry; sublingual capnometry). This review discusses several available noninvasive methods to monitor peripheral perfusion and oxygenation (Table 1).

## Clinical assessment

During circulatory failure the global decrease in oxygen supply and redistribution of blood flow caused by increased vasoconstriction results in decreased perfusion in organ systems. Some organs, including the brain, heart, and kidney, have vasomotor autoregulation that maintains blood flow in low blood pressure states. However, the cutaneous circulation is deprived of autoregulation, and the sympathetic neurohumoral response predominates, resulting in a decrease in skin perfusion and temperature in these conditions. Skin temperature is measured using the dorsal surface of the examiner hands or fingers because these areas are most sensitive to temperature perception. Patients are considered to have cool extremities if all examined extremities are cool to the examiner, or only the lower extremities are cool despite warm upper extremities, in the absence of peripheral vascular occlusive disease. Clinical signs of poor peripheral perfusion consist of a cold, pale, clammy, and mottled skin, associated with an increase in capillary refill time. In particular, skin temperature and capillary refill time have been advocated as a measure of peripheral perfusion [6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11].

Capillary refill time (CRT) has been introduced into the assessment of trauma, and a value less than 2 s is considered normal [12]. This is based on the assumption that a delayed return of a normal color after emptying the capillary bed by compression is due to decreased peripheral perfusion. CRT has been validated as a measure of peripheral perfusion with significant variation in children and adults. Schriger and Baraff [8] in a study on a normal population reported that CRT varied with age and sex. It was found that a CRT of 2 s was a normal value for most young children and young adults, but the lowest CRT was substantially higher in healthy women (2.9 s) and in the elderly (4.5 s). Using these normal variations it was further shown that a prolonged CRT did not predict a 450-ml blood loss in adult blood donors or hypovolemic states in patients admitted to the emergency room [10]. Several clinical studies have reported a poor correlation between CRT, heart rate, blood pressure, and cardiac output [6, 7, 10]. However, prolonged CRT in pediatric

**Table 1** Measurement methods to study peripheral perfusion (CRT capillary refill time,  $dTC-p$  temperature gradient central-to-peripheral,  $dTp-a$  temperature gradient peripheral-to-ambient,  $T_{skin-diff}$  forearm-to-finger tip skin-temperature gradient,  $PFI$  peripheral perfusion index, NIRS Near-infrared spectroscopy,  $Hb$  deoxygenated hemoglobin,  $HbO_2$  oxygenated hemoglobin,  $HbT$  total hemoglobin,  $SrO_2$  tissue oxygen saturation,  $Cytaa_3$  cytochrome  $a_3$ , OPS orthogonal polarization spectroscopy,  $FCD$  functional capillary density, LDF Laser Doppler flowmetry,  $PtcO_2$  oxygen partial pressure in the skin,  $PtcCO_2$  carbon dioxide partial pressure in the skin,  $Tc$ -index transcutaneous oxygen index,  $P_m/CO_2$  sublingual tissue  $PCO_2$ ,  $P_m-aCO_2$  gradient between  $PsiCO_2$  and arterial  $PCO_2$ )

Method	Variable	Advantage	Limitations
Clinical assessment	Warmth and coolness skin	Depends only on physical examination; valuable adjunct for hemodynamic monitoring in circulatory shock	Difficult interpretation in distributive shock
Body temperature gradient	$CRT$ $dTC-p$ $dTp-a$ $T_{skin-diff}$ $PFI$	Validated method to estimate dynamic variations in skin blood flow	At least two temperature probes required; does not reflect the variations in real time
Pulse oximetry	$Hb$ , $HbO_2$ , and $HbT$ variations $StO_2$ $Cytaa_3$ $FCD$	Easily obtainable; reflect real time changes in peripheral blood flow Assessment of oxygenation in all vascular compartments; can be applied to measure regional blood flow and oxygen consumption	Not accurate during patient motion Requires specific software to display the variables
NIRS		Direct visualization of the microcirculation	Observer-related bias; semiquantitative measure of perfusion
OPS		Useful method to evaluate endothelium-dependent vascular responses	Small sampling volume for cutaneous blood flow measurement; does not reflect heterogeneity of blood flow
LDF	Microvascular blood flow $PtcO_2/PtcCO_2$ $Tc$ -index $PsiCO_2$ $Psl-aCO_2$	Direct measurement of $PtcO_2/PtcCO_2$ ; early detection of peripheral hypoperfusion	Necessity to frequently change the sensor position; requires blood gas analysis
Transcutaneous oximetry		Direct measurement of tissue $PCO_2$ noninvasively	Requires blood gas analysis to obtain $PaCO_2$ ; normal and pathological values not yet defined
Sublingual capnometry			

patients has been found to be a good predictor of dehydration, reduced stroke volume, and increased blood lactate levels [6, 11]. In adult patients following cardiac surgery no significant relationship between cardiac index and CRT was found during the first 8 h following ICU admission [7].

Distal extremity skin temperature has also been related to the adequacy of the circulation. Kaplan et al. [9] compared distal extremity skin temperature (evaluated by subjective physical examination) with biochemical and hemodynamic markers of hypoperfusion in adult ICU patients. This study found that patients with cold periphery (including septic patients) had lower cardiac output and higher blood lactate levels as a marker of more severe tissue hypoxia. In another study Hasdai et al. [13] showed the importance of the physical examination in determining the prognosis of patients with cardiogenic shock. This study reported the presence of a cold and clammy skin to be an independent predictor of 30-day mortality in patients with cardiogenic shock complicating acute myocardial infarction.

The findings of these studies show that skin temperature together with CRT are a valuable adjunct in hemodynamic monitoring during circulatory shock, and should be the first approach to assess critically ill patient. Not much is known about the clinical applicability of these variables after the patient has been admitted to the intensive care unit [14].

## Temperature gradients

Since Joly and Weil [15] and Ibsen [16] studied the toe temperature as an indicator of the circulatory shock, body temperature gradients have been used as a parameter of peripheral perfusion. In the presence of a constant environmental temperature a change in the skin temperature is the result of a change in skin blood flow [17]. The temperature gradients peripheral-to-ambient ( $dTp-a$ ) and central-to-peripheral ( $dTc-p$ ) can better reflect cutaneous blood flow than the skin temperature itself. Considering a constant environment condition,  $dTp-a$  decreases and  $dTc-p$  increases during vasoconstriction. The peripheral skin temperature is measured using a regular temperature probe attached to the ventral face of the great toe. This site is more convenient for peripheral temperature measurement because of the negligible local heat production and the distal location from other monitoring devices [18]. The concept of the  $dTc-p$  is based on the transfer of heat from the body core to the skin. The heat conduction to the skin by the blood is also controlled by the degree of vasoconstriction of the arterioles and arteriovenous anastomoses. High blood flow causes heat to be conducted from the core to the skin, whereas reduction in blood flow decreases the heat conduction from the core. During vasoconstriction the temperature of the skin falls

and the heat conduction from the core decreases, and therefore the central temperature rises and the  $dTc-p$  increases. A gradient of 3–7°C occurs in patients with stable hemodynamics [19]. Hypothermia, cold ambient temperature (<20°C) [20], and vasodilatory shock limits the use of  $dTc-p$  as an estimate of peripheral perfusion. Forearm-to-fingertip skin-temperature gradient ( $T_{skin-diff}$ ) has also been used as an index of peripheral circulation to identify the initiation of thermoregulatory vasoconstriction in patients following surgery [21]. Fingertip temperature is measured with the temperature probe attached to the ventral face of the finger. The use of  $T_{skin-diff}$  is based on assumption that the reference temperature is a skin site exposed to the same ambient temperature as the fingertip. It has been applied in conditions where an ambient temperature is not stable, such as in patients undergoing surgery [21, 22, 23]. A change in ambient temperature therefore affects similarly forearm and fingertip temperature, producing little influence in the gradient. Basically, when vasoconstriction decreases fingertip blood flow, finger skin temperature decreases, and  $T_{skin-diff}$  increases. Experimental studies have suggested a  $T_{skin-diff}$  threshold of 0°C for the initiation of vasoconstriction, and a threshold of 4°C for severe vasoconstriction in anesthetized patients [22, 23].

The body temperature gradient was first applied to assess patients with circulatory shock and to differentiate central heat retention caused by fever from peripheral vasoconstriction [15, 16, 24]. A number of studies have examined the correlation between body temperature gradient and global hemodynamic variables in hypovolemic, septic and cardiogenic shock, but these have produced conflicting results [15, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31]. Henning et al. [28] studied  $dTp-a$  in patients with circulatory failure associated with hypovolemia and low cardiac output. An increase in  $dTp-a$  to more than 4–6°C over 12 h was observed in survivors, and a good relationship between the lowest  $dTp-a$  and the highest blood lactate levels was found in hypovolemic patients at time of admission. In assessing the potential value of dopamine as a therapeutic agent to treat circulatory shock Ruiz et al. [25] showed that survival is associated with an increase in  $dTp-a$  of more than 2°C, and that  $dTp-a$  is correlated to increases in cardiac output and a reduction in blood lactate levels. In examining the value of  $dTp-a$  for assessing peripheral perfusion in cardiogenic shock Vincent et al. [27] found that a cardiac index below  $1.8 \text{ l/min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$  is associated with a decrease in  $dTp-a$  below 5°C, and that the increase in  $dTp-a$  occurs earlier than the increase in skin oxygen partial pressure during recovery; this correlation was not found in septic shock. No relationship has been observed between  $dTc-p$  and cardiac output in adults with diverse causes of shock [31] or in children after open heart surgery [26, 29, 30]. One reason for the inaccurate relationship between body temperature gradient and global hemodynamic parameters could be related to an

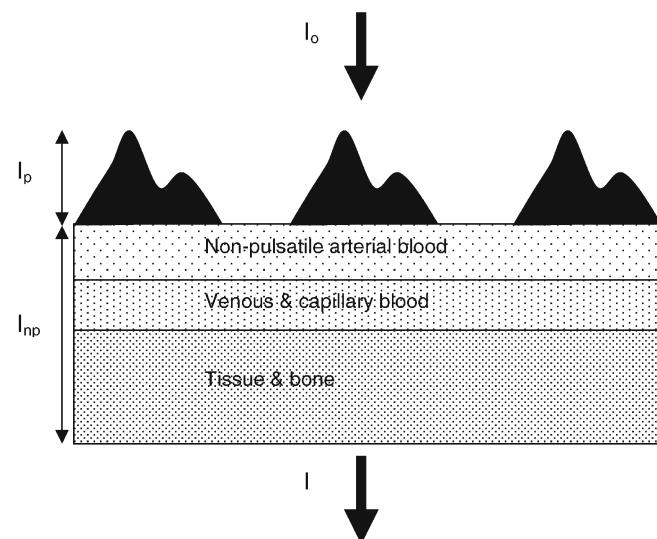
unstable environment, as skin temperature depends also on ambient temperature, and the thermoregulatory response is suppressed in anesthetized patients [32]. In addition, global hemodynamic parameters may not be sensitive enough to reflect changes in peripheral blood flow in critically ill patients [33, 34].  $T_{\text{skin-diff}}$  may be an alternative, but its use in these conditions has not yet been defined.

## Optical monitoring

Optical methods apply light with different wave lengths directly to tissue components using the scattering characteristics of tissue to assess various states of these tissues [35]. At physiological concentrations the molecules that absorb most light are hemoglobin, myoglobin, cytochrome, melanins, carotenes, and bilirubin. These substances can be quantified and measured in intact tissues using simple optical methods. The assessment of tissue oxygenation is based on the specific absorption spectrum of oxygenated hemoglobin ( $\text{HbO}_2$ ), deoxygenated hemoglobin (Hb) and cytochrome  $aa_3$  (cytaa<sub>3</sub>). Commonly used optical methods for peripheral monitoring are perfusion index, near-infrared spectroscopy, laser-Doppler flowmetry, and orthogonal polarization spectral.

### Peripheral perfusion index

The peripheral perfusion index (PFI) is derived from the photoelectric plethysmographic signal of pulse oximetry and has been used as a noninvasive measure of peripheral perfusion in critically ill patients [36]. Pulse oximetry is a monitoring technique used in probably every trauma, critically ill and surgical patient. The principle of pulse oximetry is based on two light sources with different wavelengths (660 nm and 940 nm) emitted through the cutaneous vascular bed of a finger or earlobe. The Hb absorbs more light at 660 nm and  $\text{HbO}_2$  absorbs more light at 940 nm. A detector at the far side measures the intensity of the transmitted light at each wavelength, and the oxygen saturation is derived by the ratio between the red light (660 nm) and the infrared light (940 nm) absorbed. As other tissues also absorb light, such as connective tissue, bone, and venous blood, the pulse oximetry distinguishes the pulsatile component of arterial blood from the nonpulsatile component of other tissues. Using a two-wavelength system the nonpulsatile component is then discarded, and the pulsatile component is used to calculate the arterial oxygen saturation. The overall hemoglobin concentration can be determined by a third wavelength at 800 nm, with a spectrum that resembles that of both Hb and  $\text{HbO}_2$ . The resulting variation in intensity of this light can be used to determine the variation in arterial blood volume (pulsatile component). The PFI is



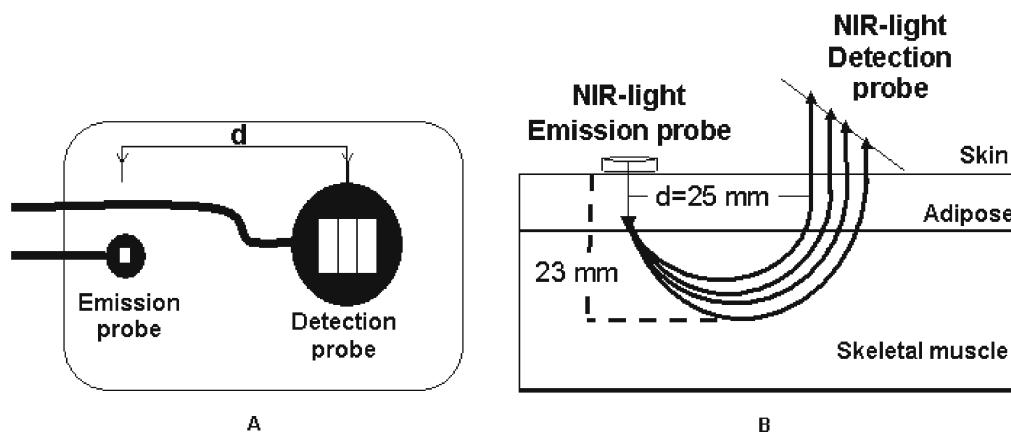
**Fig. 1** The pulsation of arterial blood causes a pulsating volume variation. Peripheral perfusion index (PFI) is calculated as the ratio between the arterial pulsatile component ( $I_p$ ) and the nonpulsatile component ( $I_{NP}$ ).  $I_o$  Source light intensity;  $I$  light intensity at the detector

calculated as the ratio between the pulsatile component (arterial compartment) and the nonpulsatile component (other tissues) of the light reaching the detector of the pulse oximetry, and it is calculated independently of the patient's oxygen saturation (Fig. 1). A peripheral perfusion alteration is accompanied by variation in the pulsatile component, and because the nonpulsatile component does not change, the ratio changes. As a result the value displayed on the monitor reflects changes in peripheral perfusion.

Studies with body temperature gradient suggest that PFI can be a direct indicator of peripheral perfusion. A PFI of 1.4 has been found to be correlated best with hypoperfusion in critically ill patients using normal values in healthy adults [36]. A good relationship between  $T_{\text{skin-diff}}$  and PFI is observed in anesthetized patients to identify the initiation of thermoregulatory vasoconstriction [37]. The PFI reflects changes in  $dT_{\text{c-p}}$  and  $T_{\text{skin-diff}}$  and therefore vascular reactivity in adult critically ill patients [36, 38]. Another study has shown that PFI can be used to predict severity of illness in neonates, with a cutoff value of 1.24 [39]. The inclusion of PFI into the pulse oximetry signal is a recent advance in clinical monitoring. However, more studies are needed to define its clinical utility.

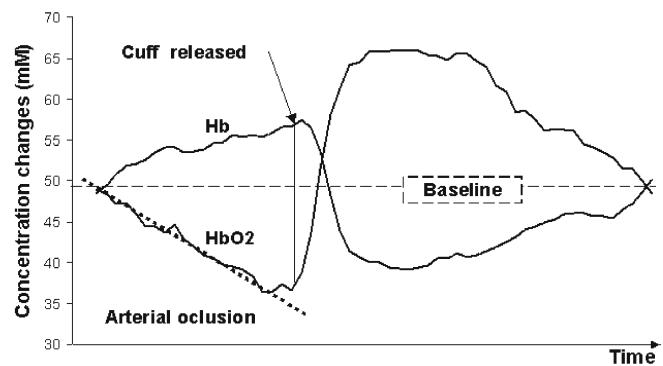
### Near-infrared spectroscopy

Near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) offers a technique for continuous, noninvasive, bedside monitoring of tissue



**Fig. 2** **A** Diagram of a distal tip of the NIRS optical cable. **B** With 25 mm spacing ( $d$ ) between emission and detection probes, approx. 95% of the detected optical signal is from 23 mm of tissue penetration

oxygenation. As with pulse oximetry, NIRS uses the principles of light transmission and absorption to measure the concentrations of hemoglobin, oxygen saturation ( $\text{StO}_2$ ), and cytaa<sub>3</sub> noninvasively in tissues. NIRS has a greater tissue penetration than pulse oximetry and provides a global assessment of oxygenation in all vascular compartments (arterial, venous, and capillary). Tissue penetration is directly related to the spacing between illumination and detection fibers. At 25 mm spacing approx. 95% of the detected optical signal is from a depth of 0 to 23 mm (Fig. 2). NIRS has been used to assess forearm skeletal muscle oxygenation during induced reactive hyperemia in healthy adults and produces reproducible measurements of tissue oxygenation during both arterial and venous occlusive events [40]. Using the venous and arterial occlusion methods NIRS can be applied to measure regional blood flow and oxygen consumption by following the rate of HbO<sub>2</sub> and Hb changes [40, 41, 42]. In the venous occlusion method a pneumatic cuff is inflated to a pressure of approx. 50 mmHg. Such a pressure blocks venous occlusion but does not impede arterial inflow. As a result venous blood volume and pressure increase. NIRS can reflect this change by an increase in HbO<sub>2</sub>, Hb, and total hemoglobin. In arterial occlusion method, the pneumatic cuff is inflated to a pressure of approx. 30 mmHg greater than systolic pressure. Such a pressure blocks both venous outflow and arterial inflow. Depletion of local available O<sub>2</sub> is monitored by NIRS as a decrease in HbO<sub>2</sub> and a simultaneous increase in Hb, whereas total Hb remains constant. After release of the occluding cuff a hyperemic response is observed (Fig. 3). Blood volume increases rapidly, resulting in an increase in HbO<sub>2</sub> and a quick washout of Hb. In addition to blood flow and evaluation of HbO<sub>2</sub> and Hb changes, NIRS can assess cytaa<sub>3</sub> redox state. Cytaa<sub>3</sub> is the final receptor in the oxygen transport chain that reacts with oxygen to form water, and approx. 90% of cellular energy is derived from this reaction. Cytaa<sub>3</sub> remains in a reduced state

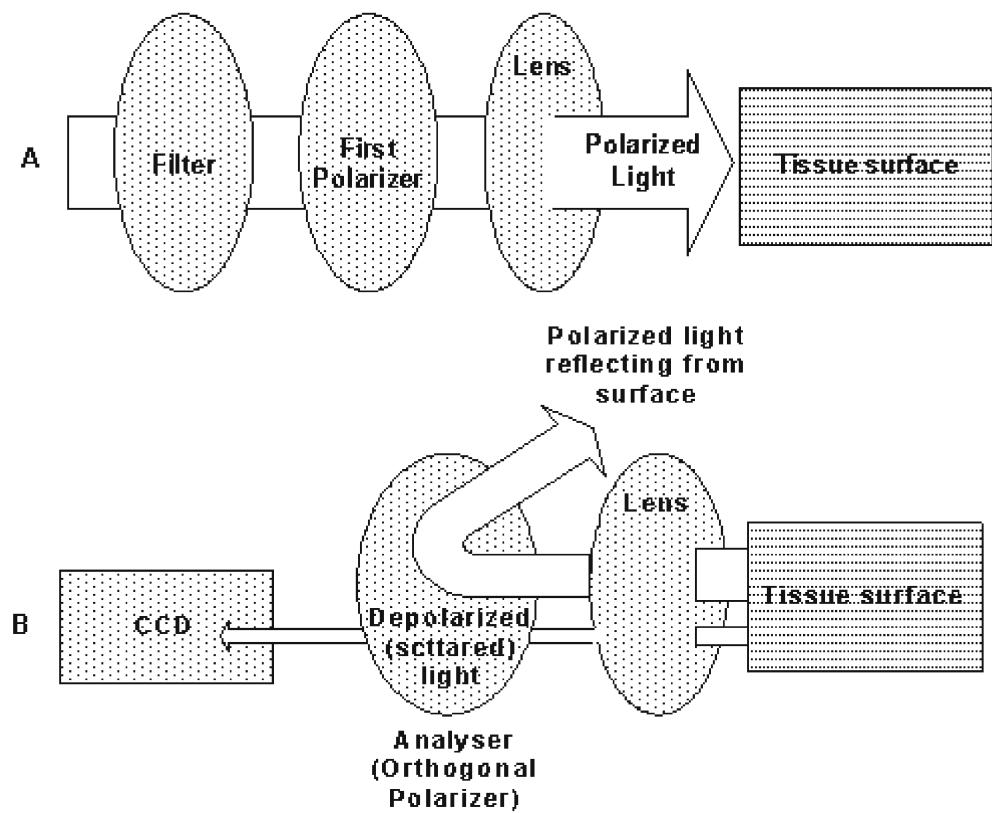


**Fig. 3** Quantitative NIRS measurements during arterial occlusion. After release of the occluding cuff blood volume increases rapidly, resulting in an increase in HbO<sub>2</sub> and a quick washout of Hb, followed by a hyperemic response. Oxygen consumption is calculated as the rate of decrease in HbO<sub>2</sub> (dotted line)

during hypoxemia. The absorption spectrum of cytaa<sub>3</sub> in its reduced state shows a weak peak at 70 nm, whereas the oxygenated form does not. Therefore monitoring changes in its redox state can provide a measure of the adequacy of oxidative metabolism. Despite the potential clinical applications of NIRS, some limitations still exist. The contribution of the cytaa<sub>3</sub> signal is small, and its interpretation remains controversial, requiring more rigorous development [43]. There is no a gold standard to which NIRS data can be directly compared, and one of the reasons is that a variety of NIRS equipment is commercially available with different working systems.

In both small- and large-animal models of hemorrhagic shock and resuscitation NIRS has demonstrated sensitivity in detecting skeletal muscle and visceral ischemia [44, 45, 46, 47]. As a noninvasive measure of peripheral perfusion NIRS has been applied in superficial muscles (brachioradialis muscle, deltoid muscle, tibialis anterior) of trauma ICU patients to monitor the adequacy of tissue

**Fig. 4** OPS optical schematic. **A** The light passes through the first polarizer and is reflected back through the lens. **B** The polarized light reflecting from the surface is eliminated, and the depolarized light forms an image of the microcirculation on a videocamera (charge-coupled device, *CCD*)



oxygenation and detect a compartment syndrome [48, 49, 50, 51, 52]. The use of NIRS in deltoid muscle during resuscitation of severe trauma patients has recently been reported [48, 49]. Cairns et al. [49] studied trauma ICU patients and reported a strong association between elevated serum lactate levels and elevated cytaa<sub>3</sub> redox state during 12 h of shock resuscitation and development of multiple organ failure. More recently McKinley et al. [48] showed a good relationship between StO<sub>2</sub>, systemic oxygen delivery and lactate in severely trauma patients during and after resuscitation over a period of 24 h. A recent study with septic and nonseptic patients used NIRS to measure both regional blood flow and oxygen consumption after venous occlusion [53]. In this study septic patients had muscular oxygen consumption twice that of nonseptic patients, but oxygen extraction was similar in both groups, emphasizing oxygen extraction dysfunction in sepsis. Another study observed no relationship between forearm blood flow, measured by NIRS, and systemic vascular resistance in septic shock patients [41]. These findings demonstrate the ability of NIRS to reflect microcirculatory dysfunction in skeletal muscle in septic shock. The potential to monitor regional perfusion and oxygenation noninvasively at the bedside makes clinical application of NIRS technology of particular interest in intensive care.

#### Orthogonal polarization spectral

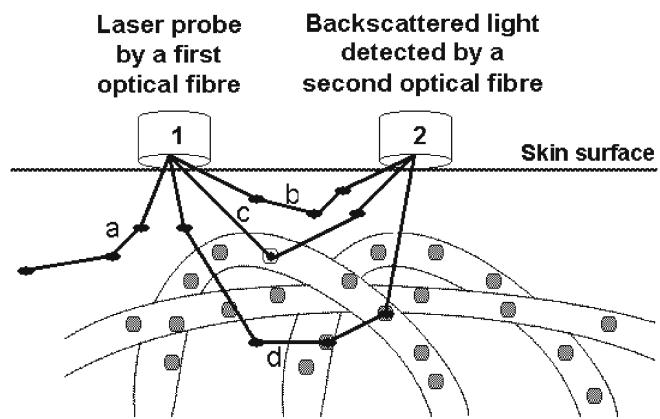
Orthogonal polarization spectral (OPS) is a noninvasive technique that uses reflected light to produce real-time images of the microcirculation. The technical characteristics of the device have been described elsewhere [54]. Light from a source passes through the first polarizer, and it is directed towards the tissue by a set of lens. As the light reaches the tissue, the depolarized light is reflected back through the lenses to a second polarizer or analyzer and forms an image of the microcirculation on the charge-coupled device, which can be captured through a single videotape (Fig. 4). The technology has been incorporated into a small hand-held video-microscope which can be used in both research and clinical settings. OPS can assess tissue perfusion using the functional capillary density (FCD), i.e., the length of perfused capillaries per observation area (measured as cm/cm<sup>2</sup>). FCD is a very sensitive parameter for determining the status of nutritive perfusion to the tissue and it is an indirect measure of oxygen delivery. One of the most easily accessible sites in humans for peripheral perfusion monitoring is the mouth. OPS produces excellent images of the sublingual microcirculation by placing the probe under the tongue. Movement artifacts, semiquantitative measure of perfusion, the presence of various secretions such as saliva and blood, observer-related bias, and inadequacy of sedation

to prevent patients from damaging the device are some of the limitations of the technique.

The use of sublingual tissues with OPS provides information about the dynamics of microcirculatory blood flow, and therefore it can monitor the perfusion during clinical treatment of circulatory shock. It has been used to monitor the effects of improvements in microcirculatory blood flow with dobutamine and nitroglycerin in volume resuscitated septic patients [55, 56]. OPS has been applied in the ICU to study the properties of sublingual microcirculation in both septic shock and cardiogenic shock [2, 56, 57, 58]. In septic patients it has been shown with OPS that microvascular alterations are more severe in patients with a worse outcome, and that these microvascular alterations can be reversed using vasodilators [2]. In patients with cardiac failure and cardiogenic shock the number of small vessels and the density of perfused vessels are lower than in controls, and the proportion of perfused vessels is higher in patients who survived than in patients who did not survive [57]. Using OPS during the time course of treatment of patients with septic shock, Sakr et al. [58] demonstrated that the behavior of the sublingual microcirculation differs between survivors and nonsurvivors. Although alterations in the sublingual microcirculation may not be representative of other microvascular beds, changes in the sublingual circulation evaluated by capnometry during hemorrhagic shock have been related to changes in perfusion of internal organs such as the liver and intestine [59]. Thus OPS could be of use in the monitoring of tissue perfusion.

### Laser Doppler flowmetry

Laser Doppler flowmetry (LDF) is a noninvasive, continuous measure of microcirculatory blood flow, and it has been used to measure microcirculatory blood flow in many tissues including neural, muscle, skin, bone, and intestine. The principle of this method is to measure the Doppler shift—the frequency change that light undergoes when reflected by moving objects, such as red blood cells. LDF works by illuminating the tissue under observation with a monochromatic laser from a probe. When the tissue is illuminated, only 3–7% is reflected. The remaining 93–97% of the light is either absorbed by various structures or undergoes scattering. Another optical fiber collects the backscattered light from the tissue and returns it to the monitor (Fig. 5). As a result LDF produces an output signal that is proportional to the microvascular perfusion [60]. Depending on the device and the degree of invasiveness it can be used to assess blood flow in muscle, gastric, rectal, and vagina mucosae. As a noninvasive measure of peripheral blood flow, however, its use is limited to the skin [60]. LDF has been applied to obtain information on the functional state of the skin microcirculation during reactive hyperemia in several conditions,



**Fig. 5** Schematic diagram of laser Doppler flowmetry. When the tissue is illuminated by a laser source (1), 93–97% of the light is either absorbed by various structures or undergoes scattering (a, b). The remaining 3–7% is reflected by moving red blood cells (c, d) and returns to the second optical fiber (2). Microvascular perfusion is defined as the product of mean red blood cells (RBC) velocity and mean RBC concentration in the volume of tissue under illumination from the probe

such as diabetes mellitus, essential hypertension, atherosclerosis, and sepsis [61]. A major limitation of this technique is that it does not take into account the heterogeneity of blood flow as the velocity measurements represent the average of velocities in all vessels of the window studied. In addition, skin blood flow signal varies markedly depending on probe position. No current laser Doppler instrument can present absolute perfusion values (e.g., ml/min per 100 g tissue) and measurements are expressed as perfusion units, which are arbitrary.

LDF is useful in evaluating endothelium-dependent vascular responses in the skin microcirculation during either reactive hyperemia [61, 62] or the noninvasive local application of acetylcholine or sodium nitroprusside [63, 64, 65]. This characteristic of LDF was used in critically ill patients to evaluate endothelial dysfunction in sepsis. Observational studies have shown that the hyperemic response in septic patients is decreased, and a relationship between changes in vasculature tone and severity of sepsis has been described [66, 67, 68]. In addition, restored vasomotion in patients with sepsis evaluated by LDF seems to be associated with a favorable prognosis [67]. The ability of LDF to assess abnormalities of skin blood flow control in sepsis could be of clinical use for early detection of microcirculatory derangements in high-risk patients.

### **PO<sub>2</sub> and PCO<sub>2</sub> transcutaneous measurements**

Continuous noninvasive measurement of oxygen and carbon dioxide tensions is possible because both gases can diffuse through the skin, and thus their partial pres-

sures can be measured in transcutaneous tissue. Normally the skin is not very permeable to gases, but at higher temperatures the ability of the skin to transport gases is improved. Oxygen sensors for transcutaneous electrochemical measurements are based on polarography: a typical amperometric transducer in which the rate of a chemical reaction is detected by the current drained through an electrode. The sensor heats the skin to 43–45°C. The skin surface oxygen tension is increased as a result of three effects: (a) heating the stratum corneum beyond 40°C changes its structure, which allows oxygen to diffuse faster; (b) the local oxygen tension is increased by shifting the oxygen dissociation curve in the heated dermal capillary blood; and (c) by dermal capillary hyperemia. These transcutaneous sensors enable us directly to estimate arterial oxygen pressure ( $\text{PaO}_2$ ) and arterial carbon dioxide pressure ( $\text{PaCO}_2$ ), and it has been successfully used for monitoring  $\text{PaO}_2$  and  $\text{PaCO}_2$  in both neonates and in adults [69, 70, 71]. Newborn infant is suitable because of its thin epidermal layer. However, in adults the skin is thicker, and differences in the skin cause the transcutaneous oxygen partial pressure ( $\text{PtcO}_2$ ) to be lower than  $\text{PaO}_2$ . The correlation between  $\text{PtcO}_2$  and  $\text{PaO}_2$  also depends on the adequacy of blood flow. The low blood flow caused by vasoconstriction during shock overcomes the vasodilatory effect of  $\text{PtcO}_2$  sensor. This causes a mild tissue hypoxia beneath the  $\text{PtcO}_2$  sensor. The lack of the  $\text{PtcO}_2$  ability to accurately reflect the  $\text{PaO}_2$  in low flow shock enables us to estimate cutaneous blood flow through the relationship between the two variables. Some studies have suggested the use of a transcutaneous oxygen index (tc-index), i.e., the changes in  $\text{PtcO}_2$  relative to changes in  $\text{PaO}_2$  [69, 72, 73, 74, 75]. When blood flow is adequate,  $\text{PtcO}_2$  and  $\text{PaO}_2$  values are almost equal, and the tc-index is close to 1. During low flow shock the  $\text{PtcO}_2$  drops and becomes dependent on the  $\text{PaO}_2$  value, and tc-index decreases. A tc-index greater than 0.7 has been reported to be associated with hemodynamic stability [69, 72, 74, 75]. Transcutaneous carbon dioxide partial pressure ( $\text{PtcCO}_2$ ) has been also used as an index of cutaneous blood flow. Differences between  $\text{PaCO}_2$  and  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  have been explained by local accumulation of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the skin due to hypoperfusion. Because of the diffusion constant of  $\text{CO}_2$  is about 20 times greater than  $\text{O}_2$ ,  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  has been showed to be less sensitive to changes in hemodynamics than  $\text{PtcO}_2$  [76]. One of the main limitations of this technique is the necessity of blood gas analysis to obtain the tc-index and  $\text{PaCO}_2$ . In addition, the sensor position must be changed every 1–2 h to avoid burns. After each repositioning a period of 15–20 min is required for the next readings, which limits its use in emergency situations.

The ability of  $\text{PtcO}_2$  to reflect tissue perfusion in critically ill adult patients has been applied using the tc-index. Tremper and Shoemaker [72] found a good correlation ( $r=0.86$ ) between tc-index and cardiac index in

patients with shock. These authors reported that at cardiac index values higher than  $2.2 \text{ l min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$  the tc-index averages 0.79, at  $1.5\text{--}2.2 \text{ l min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$  it is 0.48, and at values lower than  $1.5 \text{ l min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$  it is 0.12. However, the relationship between tc-index and cardiac index may not exist in hyperdynamic shock. Reed et al. [75] studied  $\text{PtcO}_2$  at different cardiac indices. In this study 71 measurements were made in 19 patients, and a low tc-index was seen in 71% of the patients with a cardiac index higher than  $4.21 \text{ min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$ .  $\text{PtcO}_2$  and  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  monitoring has been used as an early indicator of tissue hypoxia and subclinical hypovolemia in acutely ill patients [77, 78]. Tatevossian et al. [78] studied 48 severely injured patients during early resuscitation in the emergency department and operating room. The sequential patterns of  $\text{PtcO}_2$  and  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  were described throughout initial resuscitation. Nonsurvivors had lower  $\text{PtcO}_2$  values and higher  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  values than survivors. These differences were evident even early after the patient's arrival. The authors reported a critical tissue perfusion threshold of  $\text{PtcO}_2 50 \text{ mmHg}$  for more than 60 min and  $\text{PtcCO}_2 60 \text{ mmHg}$  for more than 30 min. Patients who failed to avoid these critical thresholds had 89% to 100% mortality. This technology has not gained widespread acceptance in clinical practice as the time needed for calibration limits its early use in the emergency department, and critical  $\text{PtcO}_2$  and  $\text{PtcCO}_2$  values have not been established.

### Sublingual capnometry

Measurement of the tissue-arterial  $\text{CO}_2$  tension gradient has been used to reflect the adequacy of tissue perfusion. The gastric and ileal mucosal  $\text{CO}_2$  clearance is been the primary reference for measurements of regional  $\text{PCO}_2$  gradient during circulatory shock [79]. The regional  $\text{PCO}_2$  gradient represents the balance between regional  $\text{CO}_2$  production and clearance. During tissue hypoxia  $\text{CO}_2$  is produced by hydrogen anions buffered by tissue bicarbonate, which adds to the amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  produced by normal oxidative metabolism. The amount of  $\text{CO}_2$  produced, either aerobically or because of tissue hypoxia, will be cleared if blood flow is maintained. In low flow states  $\text{CO}_2$  increases as a result of stagnation phenomenon [80]. Gastric tonometry is a technique that can be used to assess the adequacy of gut mucosal blood flow to metabolism. The methodological limitations of gastric tonometry required a search for a tissue in which  $\text{PCO}_2$  can be measured easily in a noninvasive approach. Comparable decreases in blood flow during circulatory shock have been also demonstrated in the sublingual tissue  $\text{PCO}_2$  ( $\text{PslCO}_2$ ) [81, 82]. The currently available system for measuring  $\text{PslCO}_2$  consists of a disposable  $\text{PCO}_2$  sensor and a battery powered handheld instrument. The instrument uses fiberoptic technology to transmit light through the sensor placed between the tongue and the

sublingual mucosa. Carbon dioxide diffuses across a semipermeable membrane of the sensor and into a fluorescent dye solution. The dye emits light that is proportional to the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> present. This light intensity is analyzed by the instrument and displayed as a numeric PslCO<sub>2</sub> value.

Clinical studies have suggested that PslCO<sub>2</sub> is a reliable marker of tissue hypoperfusion [83, 84, 85, 86]. Weil et al. [86] applied PslCO<sub>2</sub> in 46 patients with acutely life threatening illness or injuries admitted to the emergency department or ICU. In this study 26 patients with physical signs of circulatory shock and high blood lactate levels had higher PslCO<sub>2</sub> values, and a PslCO<sub>2</sub> threshold value of 70 mmHg was predictive for the severity of the circulatory failure. Similarly as PCO<sub>2</sub> in the gut mucosal, PslCO<sub>2</sub> is also influenced by PaCO<sub>2</sub> [87]. Hence the gradient between PslCO<sub>2</sub> and PaCO<sub>2</sub> (Psl-aCO<sub>2</sub>) is more specific for tissue hypoperfusion. This was shown in the study by Marik and Bankov [85] who determined the prognostic value of sublingual capnometry in 54 hemodynamic unstable critically ill patients. In this study Psl-aCO<sub>2</sub> was a sensitive marker for tissue perfusion and a useful endpoint for the titration of goal-directed therapy. Psl-aCO<sub>2</sub> differentiated better than PslCO<sub>2</sub> alone between survivors and nonsurvivors, and a difference of more than 25 mmHg indicated a poor prognosis. One limitation of

this technique includes the necessity of blood gas analysis to obtain PaCO<sub>2</sub>. In addition, normal vs. pathological Psl-aCO<sub>2</sub> values are not well defined.

## Conclusion

The conventional systemic hemodynamic and oxygenation parameters are neither specific nor sensitive enough to detect regional hypoperfusion. In clinical practice a more complete evaluation of tissue oxygenation can be achieved by adding noninvasive assessment of perfusion in peripheral tissues to global parameters. Noninvasive monitoring of peripheral perfusion could be a complementary approach that allows very early application throughout the hospital, including the emergency department, operating room, and hospital wards. Such approach can be applied using both simple physical examination and new current technologies, as discussed above. Although these methods may reflect variations in peripheral perfusion with certain accuracy, more studies are needed to define the precise role of such methods in the management of the critically ill patients. Finally, evidence for clinical and cost effectiveness of these methods is an important aspect that needs a formal technology assessment.

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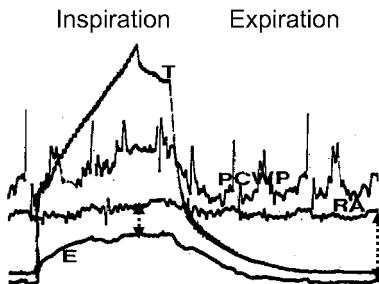
## Ultrasonographic examination of the venae cavae

There are two venae cavae in humans. The superior vena cava (SVC) comprises the connection of the left and right brachiocephalic veins and ends on the top of the right atrium, after entering the pericardium. The inferior vena cava (IVC) comprises the connection of the left and right iliac veins and ends on the floor of right atrium, after crossing the diaphragm. Whereas the SVC is an intrathoracic vessel, the IVC is an intraabdominal one, its short intrathoracic part being purely virtual. Both venae cavae provide venous return to the right heart, approx. 25% via the SVC and 75% via IVC [1, 2].

Ultrasonographic examination of the SVC can be performed by a transesophageal approach [3]. To remain open this collapsible vessel requires a distending pressure greater than the critical pressure producing collapse, i.e. its closing pressure. Because lung inflation increases pleural pressure more than right atrial pressure, the distending pressure of the SVC, i.e. right atrial pressure minus pleural pressure, is reduced by lung inflation, and may become insufficient to maintain the vessel open in a hypovolemic patient (Fig. 1). This collapsible vessel can be compared to a “Starling resistor.” The influence of SVC zone conditions on respiratory changes in SVC diameter is illustrated with clinical examples in Fig. 2.

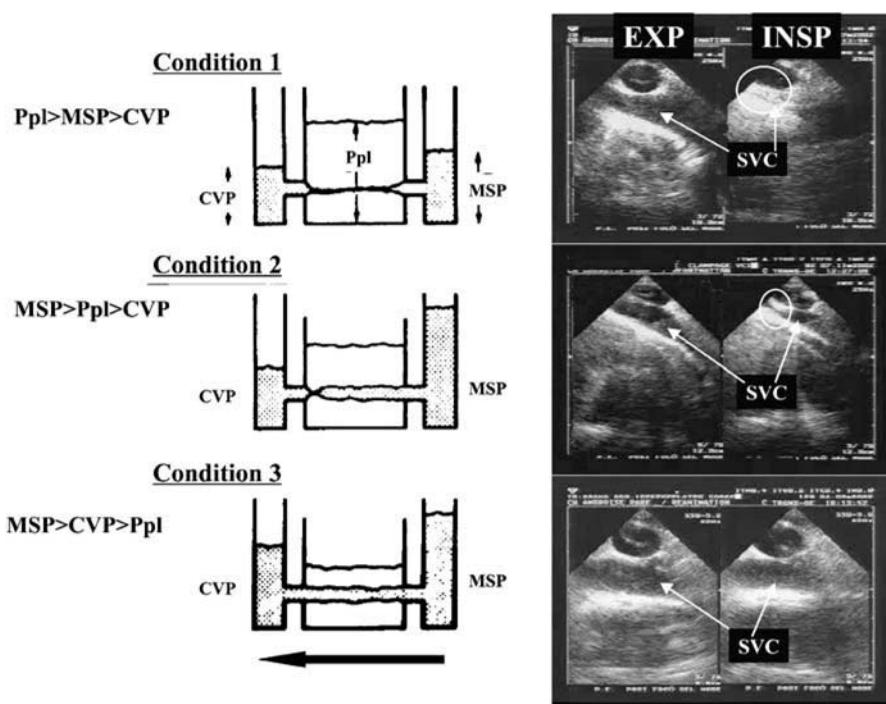
We have thus proposed to use the SVC collapsibility index, calculated as maximal expiratory diameter minus minimal inspiratory diameter, divided by maximal expiratory diameter, as an index of fluid responsiveness in mechanically ventilated patients exhibiting circulatory failure [4]. This requires recording of a long-axis view of the vessel using a multiplane transesophageal probe, by coupling motion mode with two-dimensional mode. Our measurements in a group of 66 patients with septic shock as reported in a previous issue, demonstrated that a SVC collapsibility index higher than 36% predicts a positive response to volume expansion, marked by a significant increase in Doppler cardiac output, with 90% sensitivity and 100% specificity [4]. We also found a bimodal distribution for the SVC collapsibility index: most patients exhibited either a partial or complete collapse of the vessel or the absence of significant change in its diameter during inflation. This confirms our hypothesis that the SVC can be compared to a “Starling resistor” which obeys the all-or-nothing law.

Ultrasonographic examination of the IVC can be performed by a transthoracic, subcostal approach [5, 6]. Mea-

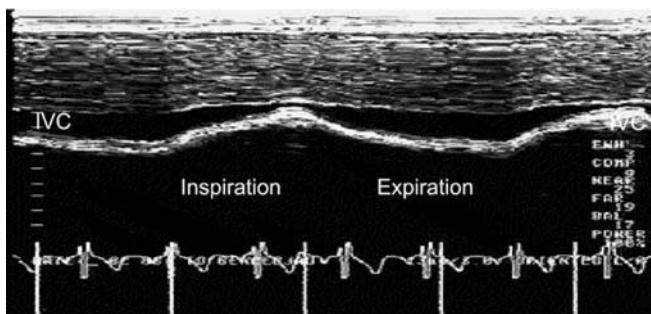


**Fig. 1** Simultaneous recordings of tracheal pressure (*T*), pulmonary capillary wedge pressure (*PCWP*), right atrial pressure (*RA*), and esophageal pressure (*E*, as a surrogate for pleural pressure). During lung inflation (inspiration) pleural pressure increases more than right atrial (or central venous) pressure, leading to an inspiratory decrease in venous distending pressure (arrows)

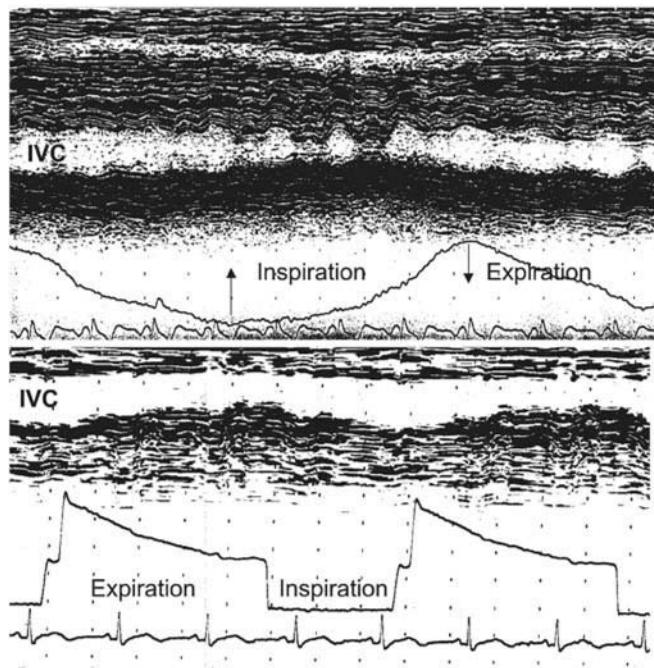
**Fig. 2** Left Schematic representation of the superior vena cava (SVC) as a Starling resistor, with an inflow pressure (the upper body mean systemic pressure, MSP), an outflow pressure (the central venous pressure, CVP), and an external pressure (the pleural pressure, Ppl). Right panel Clinical examples illustrating the three zone conditions. Top panel (condition 1) Inflow pressure becomes lower than the pleural pressure during lung inflation, which produces a complete collapse of the whole vessel. This setting is illustrated by ultrasonographic examination of the venae cavae in a hypovolemic patient exhibiting low MSP. Middle panel (condition 2) the outflow pressure is reduced, and lung inflation produces a localized collapse at entry into the right atrium. This setting is illustrated (right) by ultrasonographic examination after clamping of the inferior vena cava during a surgical procedure, a maneuver which suddenly decreases CVP but does not change MSP. Bottom panel (condition 3) Outflow pressure is much greater than the external pressure, and the SVC remains fully open during lung inflation. This setting is illustrated (right) by ultrasonographic examination of the venae cavae after volume expansion



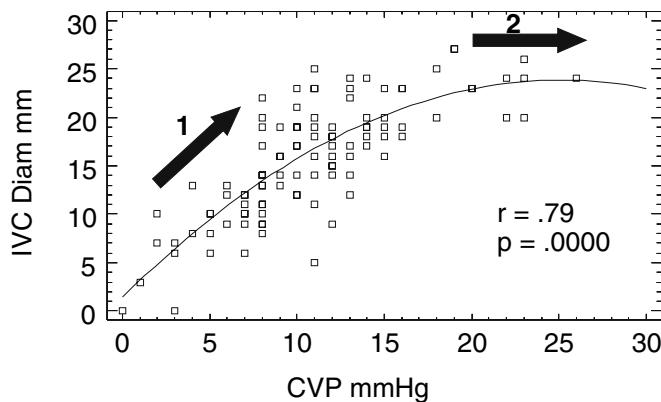
surement of IVC diameter in different positions has proven useful in separating normal subjects from patients with elevated right atrial pressure [7]. In their famous study of venous return Guyton et al. [8] observed in dogs that negative right atrial pressure from 0 down to -4 mm Hg increases venous return, but then beyond -4 mm Hg, further increase in the negative pressure causes no more increase in the venous return. Guyton et al. explained this failure by the collapse of the IVC when entering the thoracic cavity, illustrating the inability of a collapsible vessel to transmit a negative pressure. To our knowledge, the first demonstration of the reality of this phenomenon in humans was provided by our group in asthmatic patients [9] (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3** An example of M mode echocardiography of the inferior vena cava (IVC) in spontaneously breathing asthmatic patients. Note the short duration of inspiration, accompanied by a collapse of the vessel, and the increased duration of the expiration (compare Fig. 4, above)



**Fig. 4** M mode echocardiography of the inferior vena cava (IVC) in a spontaneously breathing healthy volunteer (above) and in a mechanically ventilated patient (below). Cyclic changes in IVC diameters are opposite, the largest value being observed during expiration in spontaneous breathing, and during inspiration in positive pressure breathing



**Fig. 5** Simultaneous measurement of central venous pressure (CVP) and inferior vena cava diameter (IVC diam) recorded at end-expiration in 108 mechanically ventilated patients. The pressure/diameter relationship for the vessel is characterized by an initial ascending part (arrow 1), where the index of compliance (slope of diameter/pressure curve) does not change, and a final horizontal part (arrow 2), where the index of compliance progressively decreases, reflecting distension

In a healthy subject breathing spontaneously, cyclic changes in pleural pressure, which are transmitted to the right atrial pressure, produce cyclic changes in venous return, with an inspiratory acceleration, inducing an inspiratory decrease in IVC diameter of approx. 50% (Fig. 4, *above*) [5]. This cyclic change in vena cava diameter is abolished, however, when the vessel is dilated because, although some inspiratory increase in venous return persists, the vessel actually stays on the horizontal part of its pressure-diameter relationship (Fig. 5). This is the case when cardiac tamponade [10] or severe right ventricular failure is present [6].

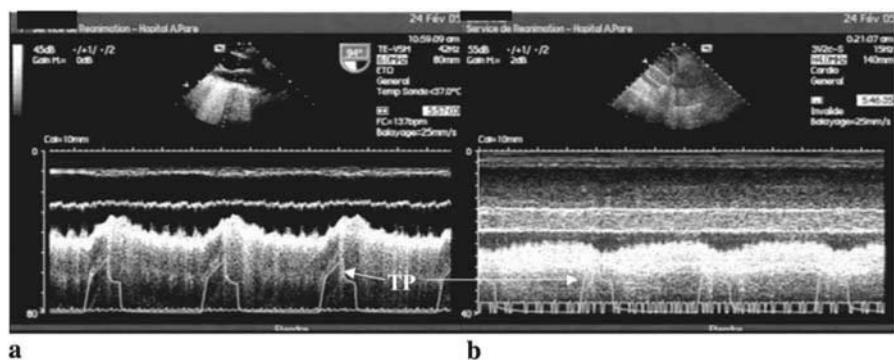
In a mechanically ventilated patient, the inspiratory phase produces an increase in pleural pressure, which is transmitted to the right atrial pressure, thus reducing the venous return. As a result respiratory changes in IVC diameter are reversed, compared with those observed during spontaneous breathing, with an inspiratory increase, and an expiratory decrease (Fig. 4, *below*). However, regarding

spontaneous breathing these changes are abolished by vena cava dilatation produced by a high volume status, and/or a high right atrial pressure, the inferior vena cava staying on the horizontal part of its pressure-diameter relationship (Fig. 5). Cyclic respiratory changes in IVC diameter can thus be observed only with a normal or low volume status in a mechanically ventilated patient. In the past, these changes were poorly correlated with atrial pressure during mechanical ventilation [11]. Lack of IVC diameter variation in a mechanically ventilated patient exhibiting circulatory failure rules out the patient's ability to respond fluid in more than 90% of cases [12].

Feissel et al. [12] first proposed the use of cyclic respiratory changes in IVC diameter to detect fluid responsiveness in a mechanically ventilated patient, and their original findings are reported in a recent issue. Expressing respiratory variability in IVC diameter as maximal inspiratory diameter minus minimal expiratory diameter, divided by the average value of the two diameters, they found that a 12% increase in inferior vena cava diameter during lung inflation allowed discrimination between responders and non-responders to volume loading, with a positive predictive value of 93% and a negative predictive value of 92% [12]. The great merit of this work is to propose a noninvasive parameter to evaluate volume loading. Moreover, this echocardiographic measurement is very easy at the bedside, and requires only minimal experience in echocardiography (Fig. 6). The findings of Feissel et al. are confirmed in an identical study by Barbier et al. [13], which appears in the same issue. It remains to be seen whether this index is still reliable in patients with a significant increase in intra-abdominal pressure, which could limit IVC diameter variations.

Another phenomenon occasionally observed in the IVC during mechanical ventilation is backward flow, which is not caused by tricuspid regurgitation but by cyclic compression of the right atrium by lung inflation. Such a sudden compression boosts blood backward from the right atrium to the IVC and does not concern tricuspid valve competency [14]. This backward flow might explain in part the inaccuracy of the thermodilution method in

**Fig. 6a,b** Ultrasonographic examination of the superior (a) and inferior (b) veiae cavae in the same mechanically ventilated patient, who exhibited hypotension. Transesophageal echocardiography demonstrated a partial collapse of the SVC at each inflation, whereas echocardiography by a subcostal approach demonstrated a marked increase in IVC diameter. After blood volume expansion cardiac index significantly increased, hypotension was corrected, and variations in vena cava diameter disappeared. TP: tracheal pressure



measuring cardiac output in mechanically ventilated patients [14].

In conclusion, ultrasonographic examination of the venae cavae provides new and accurate indices of fluid re-

sponsiveness in mechanically ventilated patients exhibiting circulatory failure. In our opinion, a complete evaluation of volume status in these patients should include both IVC and SVC examination.

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Sairam Parthasarathy  
Martin J. Tobin

## Sleep in the intensive care unit

**Abstract** Abnormalities of sleep are extremely common in critically ill patients, but the mechanisms are poorly understood. About half of total sleep time occurs during the daytime, and circadian rhythm is markedly diminished or lost. Judgments based on inspection consistently overestimate sleep time and do not detect sleep disruption. Accordingly, reliable polygraphic recordings are needed to measure sleep quantity and quality in critically ill patients. Critically ill patients exhibit more frequent arousals and awakenings than is normal, and decreases in rapid eye movement and slow wave sleep. The degree of sleep fragmentation is at least equivalent to that seen in patients with obstructive sleep apnea. About 20% of arousals and awakenings are related to noise, 10% are related to patient care activi-

ties, and the cause for the remainder is not known; severity of underlying disease is likely an important factor. Mechanical ventilation can cause sleep disruption, but the precise mechanism has not been defined. Sleep disruption can induce sympathetic activation and elevation of blood pressure, which may contribute to patient morbidity. In healthy subjects, sleep deprivation can decrease immune function and promote negative nitrogen balance. Measures to improve the quantity and quality of sleep in critically ill patients include careful attention to mode of mechanical ventilation, decreasing noise, and sedative agents (although the latter are double-edged swords).

**Keywords** Sleep · Critical illness · Mechanical ventilation · Artificial respiration · Arousal

### Introduction

In his roman-a-clef, “Ravelstein”, the Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow [1] describes being admitted to an intensive care unit and receiving mechanical ventilation:

“I was now the dying man. My lungs had failed. A machine did my breathing for me. Unconscious, I had no more idea of death than the dead have. But my head (I assume it was my head) was full of visions, delusions, and hallucinations. These were not dreams or nightmares. Nightmares have an escape hatch....”

Despite the obvious importance of sleep and its desirability in a patient with a serious illness, we know nothing of the visions, hallucinations and dreams experienced by a critically ill patient such as Bellow. Indeed, we

know little of the sleep experienced by a critically ill patient. But we do know that sleep is commonly disrupted in critically ill patients [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16], and that sleep disruption may adversely affect patient outcome [8, 17]. In this review, we discuss the nature of sleep disturbances in critically ill patients, potential causes, and possible therapies.

### Normal sleep and circadian rhythm

Healthy young adults experience two distinct states of sleep: rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM (NREM) sleep. REM sleep accounts for about 25% of sleep time and is characterized by episodic bursts of rapid

**Table 1** Studies of sleep in critically ill patients

More than 24 h	Number of patients	Patient type	Sleep staging	Arousals and awakenings per hour	Mechanical ventilation (%)
Polysomnography performed over 24 h					
Hilton [2]	10	Medical	Yes	Not listed	Not listed
Aurell [3]	9	Postoperative	Yes	Not listed	Some patients
Gottschlich [4]	11	Burn patients	Yes	>63	100
Cooper [5]	20	Medical	Yes	39	100
Freedman [6]	22	Medical	Yes	>11	100
Valente [7]	24	Head trauma	Yes	Not listed	100
Gabor [8]	7	Medical	Yes	22	100
Polysomnography performed only at nighttime					
Johns [9]	5	Postoperative	Yes	Not listed	Not listed
Orr 10	9	Postoperative	Yes	Not listed	Not listed
Broughton [11]	12	Medical	Yes	>21	NA
Knill [12]	12	Postoperative	Yes	>21	Not listed
Edwards [13]	21	Medical	Yes	Not listed	95
Aaron [14]	6	Medical	Yes	>19	Not listed
Parthasarathy [15]	11	Medical	Yes	58	100
Richards [16]	64	Medical	Not listed	Not listed	0
Polysomnography not performed					
Woods [18]	4	Postoperative		Not listed	
Helton [19]	62	Not listed		Not listed	
Tweedie [20]	15	Medical and postoperative		80	
Kong [21]	60	Medical		100	
Hurel [22]	223	Medical and postoperative		0	
Freedman [23]	203	Medical and postoperative		0	
Simini [24]	162	Medical and postoperative		0	
Treggiari [25]	40	Postoperative		0	
Walder [26]	17	Postoperative		60	
Shilo [27]	8	Medical		50	
Olson [28]	843	Medical and postoperative		Not listed	
Topf [29]	97	Postoperative		Not listed	
Nelson [30]	100	Medical		60	
Mundigler [31]	24	Medical and postoperative		100	
McKinley [32]	14	Medical and postoperative		0	

eye movements, irregularities in respiration and heart rate, and paralysis of major muscle groups with the exception of the diaphragm and upper airway muscles. NREM sleep is divided into four stages (1, 2, 3 and 4). The progression of sleep from stage 1 through to stage 4 is accompanied by a progressive increase in the arousal threshold (the ability to wake in response to a stimulus). Stage 1 occurs at sleep onset and is also a transitional state between sleep stages. Up to 50% of the night is spent in stage 2 sleep, which is characterized by spindles and K complexes on the electroencephalograph (EEG). Progression of stage 2 is accompanied by the gradual appearance of high-voltage slow wave activity on the EEG (greater than 75 µV and less than 2 Hz). When such slow-wave activity exceeds 20% of the time in a 30-s epoch, sleep is categorized as stage 3; when it exceeds 50%, sleep is categorized as stage 4. Slow wave sleep is considered the most restorative. NREM sleep normally cycles with REM sleep every 90 min. The cycling of sleep and wakefulness, in turn, is regulated by a biological clock that operates over a 24-h period (circadian rhythm). In addition to sleep, the biolog-

ical clock regulates several physiological, behavioral, and biochemical rhythms. Hormone secretion (cortisol, growth hormone), body temperature, immune function, coronary artery muscle tone, and bronchial smooth muscle tone, to name a few, exhibit marked circadian variability.

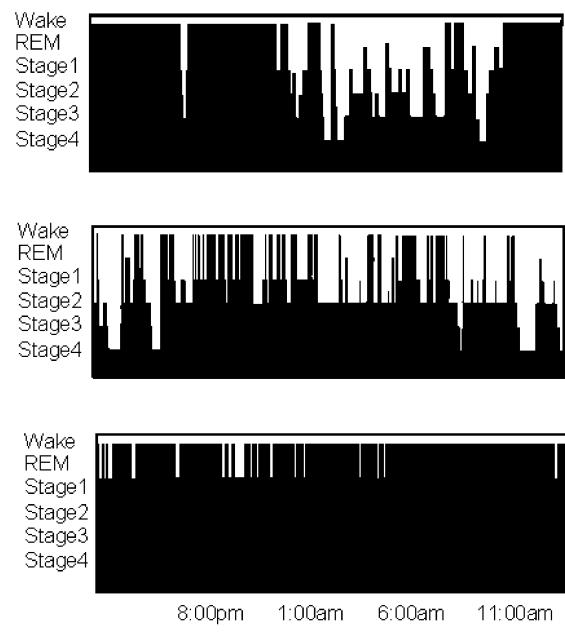
### Abnormalities of sleep in critically ill patients

Just as with ambulatory patients, sleep in critically ill patients is assessed in terms of quantity, distribution over 24 h, and lack of continuity. Also assessed is the type and depth of sleep—rapid eye movement (REM) and non-REM (stages 1, 2, 3 and 4)—and the pattern from day to day in the distribution of sleep over a 24-h period (circadian rhythm). Accurate measurement of sleep quantity and quality requires reliable polygraphic recordings. Judgments based on inspection consistently overestimate sleep time [3] and do not detect sleep disruption [3, 13]. Table 1 classifies research reports on sleep in critically ill patients into studies involving polysomno-

graphic recordings over 24 h [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8], polysomnographic recordings during nighttime alone [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16], and studies without polysomnographic recordings [18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32]. Also indicated is the type of patient population, whether patients were receiving mechanical ventilation, and whether sleep stages and disruption were adequately reported. Of the 28 studies listed in Table 1, 15 employed polysomnography [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16], and 7 included continuous recordings for 24 h or longer [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]. These studies reveal that almost half of total sleep time in critically ill patients can occur during the daytime [5, 8].

Investigators differ in their conclusions as to whether critically ill patients are sleep deprived. Three groups of investigators found that critically ill patients have a normal or near normal total sleep time, an average of 7–10.4 h a day [4, 5, 6]. Three other groups of investigators found a decrease in total sleep time, 3.6–6.2 h a day [2, 3, 8]. The investigators in one of the studies revealing decreased sleep time had deliberately restricted sedatives and hypnotics [3], although patients received sedatives in the other two studies that revealed sleep deprivation [2, 8]. Even in the studies revealing adequate amounts of sleep, the investigators noted large variations in total sleep time among the patients. Cooper and co-workers found that some patients slept for hardly an hour and other patients for nearly 15 of 24 h [5] (Fig. 1). Total sleep time in the study of Freedman and co-workers varied from 1.7 to 19.4 h [6]. Patients falling in the lowest quartile for total sleep time in these studies are clearly suffering from major sleep deprivation. In addition to variation in sleep quality from patient to patient, sleep quality may vary from night to night within a patient as a result of changes in acuity of illness [33], pain, and sedative and analgesic infusions. As such, sleep deprivation occurs in many, if not all, critically ill patients. To achieve better clarification of the frequency and severity of sleep deprivation, longitudinal studies in a large number of patients are needed; it will be essential to control for the effects of sedation, analgesia, and acuity of illness when conducting such studies.

In 11 critically ill patients, Parthasarathy and Tobin [15] noted 19 arousals (abrupt shifts in EEG frequency lasting more than 3 s) and 35 awakenings (EEG features compatible with wakefulness) per hour. Total sleep disruption, 54 arousals and awakenings per hour, was more than twice that seen in healthy individuals similarly instrumented. Cooper and co-workers [5] also reported frequent sleep disruption, with 42 arousals and awakenings per hour, and Gabor and co-workers [8] reported somewhat less frequent disruption, 22 arousals and awakenings per hour. With the exception of the three preceding studies [5, 8, 15], the remaining investigators who obtained EEG recordings in critically ill patients did not specify the sum of arousals and awakenings [3, 7, 9, 10,



### Hour of the day

**Fig. 1** Sleep stages, along the vertical axis, over a 24-h period in three critically ill patients with disrupted sleep. The hypnogram in patient 1 (top) reveals a normal nocturnal sleep pattern. Patients 2 (middle) slept for 65% of time, predominantly stages 1 and 2, and wakened repeatedly. Patient 3 (bottom) had isolated episodes of stage 1 sleep but was awake for most of 24 h. (Modified from [5] with permission)

16], making it impossible to compare studies in that respect (Table 1). The degree of sleep fragmentation in studies of critically ill patients, however, is equivalent to that in patients with obstructive sleep apnea [34].

Sleep is normally divided into rapid eye movement (REM) and non-REM (NREM) sleep. Critically ill patients spend 6% or less of sleep time in REM sleep as opposed to the normal of 25% [5, 6, 12]. The decrease in REM sleep has been attributed to medications (narcotics) [12], lack of sustained sleep needed to reach REM sleep [6], disturbance of circadian rhythm, underlying disease, and endotoxin release [35, 36]. The reduction in REM sleep might also be an adaptive response to critical illness because REM is a time of sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalance and increased susceptibility to breathing abnormalities. Critically ill patients also experience less of stages 3 and 4 of NREM, which are characterized by stable respiratory control and are devoid of sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalances.

Critically ill patients may not exhibit the EEG features of sleep and wakefulness conventionally seen in ambulatory patients [5]. Cooper and co-workers found that 7 of 20 mechanically ventilated patients were in coma and 5 patients did not exhibit EEG characteristics of stage 2 sleep (spindles or K complexes). Four patients

exhibited pathological wakefulness (a combination of behavioral correlates of wakefulness and EEG features of slow wave sleep), occupying 26–68% of the 24-h recording. Only 8 of the 20 patients demonstrated EEG characteristics of sleep, and even these patients had an average of 39 arousals and awakenings per hour [5] (Fig. 1).

Obtaining reliable EEG recordings is difficult in critically ill patients. Electrical interference (60 Hz) arising from equipment such as infusion pumps or ventilators [37] is common; interference also arises from muscle contractions in agitated patients [38]. To achieve satisfactory EEG signals, which may consist of only a few micro volts, it is necessary to apply electrodes to appropriate areas of the scalp; the skin also requires careful preparation to ensure low contact impedance (preferably less than 5 Ohms). To further minimize interference, all wires between a patient and preamplifier must be as short as possible [37]. Additional challenges in conducting research studies are avoiding a change in sedative medications, curtailing unnecessary visits by hospital personnel, and minimizing agitation.

A few investigators have studied circadian rhythms in critically ill patients. Mundeglier and co-workers [31] measured urinary 6-sulfatoxymelatonin every 4 h over 24 h. Compared with 7 non-septic critically ill patients and 21 healthy volunteers, the amplitude of circadian fluctuation in this melatonin metabolite was markedly lower in 17 critically ill patients suffering from septic shock.

### **Relationship between sedation and sleep**

Critically ill patients are often given sedatives to increase patient comfort, decrease anxiety and agitation, and promote amnesia and sleep [25, 39]. Continuous infusion of sedatives, however, may prolong the duration of mechanical ventilation by 2.5 days and prolong ICU stay by 3.5 days [40]. The effect of sedative agents on the depth of sedation has been rigorously studied [39, 41, 42], although little is known about its effect on sleep quality in critically ill patients [43]. Over a 5-day period, 40 non-intubated critically ill patients were randomized to nocturnal midazolam and propofol [25]. On a 10-point self-rating scale, both groups reported a tendency towards improved sleep quality: from 6.3 to 7.2. The infusions were titrated to achieve a score of 3 or greater on the Ramsay sedation scale (a score of 3 indicates that a patient is asleep but awakens with a brisk response to a glabellar tap or a loud auditory stimulus) [42]. Self-perception of sleep quality was not different for propofol and midazolam (range 0.1–9.7; mean of 7.2). Some patients continued to rate sleep quality close to zero on the fifth day. These data indicate that self-perception of sleep quality can be poor with high dosages of sedatives

despite achieving adequate levels of sedation. Severe sleep fragmentation may also occur in mechanically ventilated patients despite sedatives and analgesics [4, 5].

Some of the discrepancies between bedside assessment of sedation and subjective scoring of sleep may reflect known limitations in the Ramsay sedation scale [43]. Kong and co-workers studied the efficacy of midazolam and isoflurane in reducing plasma levels of catecholamines when similar levels of sedation (on the Ramsay scale) were achieved. Although both agents achieved comparable levels of sedation, isoflurane, but not midazolam, lowered the plasma levels of catecholamines from baseline [21]. The persistently elevated catecholamines in the patients receiving midazolam may have produced sleep disruption, although the explanation is no more than a possibility because polysomnography was not performed.

Benzodiazepines, narcotic analgesics, and propofol are commonly used to sedate critically ill patients [39]. Benzodiazepines improve behavioral aspects of sleep. They decrease the time needed to fall asleep, decrease awakenings, increase sleep duration, and increase sleep efficiency (duration of sleep as a percentage of time in bed). Benzodiazepines, however, also increase the number of spindles, increase cortical EEG frequency (at low doses), decrease EEG amplitude and frequency (at high doses), and suppress REM and slow wave sleep [44]. Although the clinical importance of these EEG alterations is not totally clear, an ideal hypnotic should not disturb the normal sleep pattern. Narcotics can also suppress REM sleep, cause a dose-dependent slowing of EEG, and suppress slow wave sleep—the most restorative stage of sleep [12, 44, 45]. In sum, a medicated state may resemble sleep on the surface, but may not provide the physiological benefits associated with true sleep.

### **Factors contributing to sleep disruption**

#### **Noise and hospital staff**

The level of noise in the ICU ranges from 50 to 75 dB, with peaks of up to 85 dB [8, 26, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52]. This level of noise is comparable to that in a factory (80 dB) or a busy office (70 dB), and is louder than noise in a bedroom (40 dB) [51]. (The decibel scale is logarithmic, and an increase of 10 dB represents a doubling of noise.) When studying the relationship between ICU noise and sleep disruption, investigators commonly attribute arousals to noise when they occur within 3 s of a measurable (greater than 15 dB) increase in noise [5, 6]. In these studies, 11–20% of arousals were attributed to noise [5, 6]. Because critically ill patients have frequent arousals and awakenings (20–68 per hour, Table 1) some arousals may mistakenly be attributed to noise. In a study of healthy volunteers subjected to audio recordings

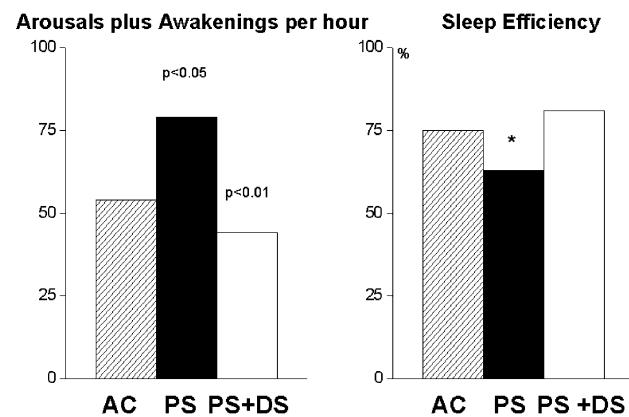
of ICU noise, a greater than normal number of awakenings and less REM and total sleep time were observed [50, 53]. Findings in healthy subjects, however, may not apply to critically ill patients, who may have a higher arousal threshold secondary to sleep deprivation, sedative agents, or coma.

Gabor and co-workers [8] recorded audio and video signals in synchrony with polysomnography in seven patients receiving mechanical ventilation. Twenty percent of the arousals and awakenings were related to noise peaks, and only 10% were related to patient care activities. The cause of 68% of arousals and awakenings could not be identified [8].

#### Mechanical ventilation

About 40% of patients in an ICU receive mechanical ventilation [54], but investigations into the precise mechanisms of the effect of mechanical ventilation on sleep are only commencing. Mechanically ventilated patients experience considerable sleep disruption, with as many as 20–63 arousals and awakenings per hour [4, 5, 8]. At first glance, a comparison of mechanically ventilated patients with spontaneously breathing critically ill patients should provide a reasonable method for investigating the effect of mechanical ventilation on sleep (Table 1). Such comparisons might prove misleading for a number of reasons. First, acuity of illness may be greater in ventilated patients than in spontaneously breathing patients. Second, spontaneously breathing patients are vulnerable to obstructive apneas, which will be prevented by an endotracheal tube. Third, factors associated with ventilation, such as masks, tracheal tubes, suctioning, mouth guards, nasogastric tubes, and physical restraints, may contribute to sleep fragmentation [55]. Fourth, sedatives and analgesics are more likely during mechanical ventilation. An attractive way to study the effect of mechanical ventilation on sleep might be to study tracheostomized patients while connected and disconnected from a ventilator over a short time period.

Notwithstanding methodological concerns with the studies, data suggest that the mode of ventilation can influence sleep quality [56, 57]. Meza and co-workers [56] showed that pressure support induces central apneas in healthy subjects during sleep. In a study of 11 critically ill patients during one night of sleep, Parthasarathy and Tobin observed greater sleep fragmentation during pressure support than during assist-control ventilation: 79 versus 54 arousals and awakenings per hour (Fig. 2). Six of the 11 patients developed central apneas during pressure support, but not during assist-control ventilation [15]. Heart failure was more common in the patients who developed apneas than in the patients without apneas: 83% versus 20%. The findings emphasize that research on sleep in critically ill patients needs to be controlled for the venti-



**Fig. 2** Sleep fragmentation (left panel) and sleep efficiency (right panel) during assist-control ventilation and pressure support with and without dead space. Sleep fragmentation, measured as the number of arousals and awakenings, was greater during pressure support (solid bars) than during assist-control ventilation (hatched bars) or pressure support with dead space (open bars). Sleep efficiency (right panel) was also lower during pressure support (solid bars) than during assist-control ventilation (hatched bars) or pressure support with dead space (open bars). (Modified from [15] with permission)

lator mode. In these 11 patients, the most important determinant of apneas was the difference between  $\text{PCO}_2$  during resting breathing and the patient's apnea threshold. When a patient's resting  $\text{PCO}_2$  was close to the apnea threshold, central apneas were more likely to develop. The addition of dead space caused a further increase in resting  $\text{PCO}_2$  above the apnea threshold and decreased the sum of arousals and awakenings from 83 to 44 events per hour (in the patients who developed central apneas during pressure support). Sleep efficiency (time asleep as a percentage of study duration) increased from 63 to 81% with the addition of dead space (Fig. 2).

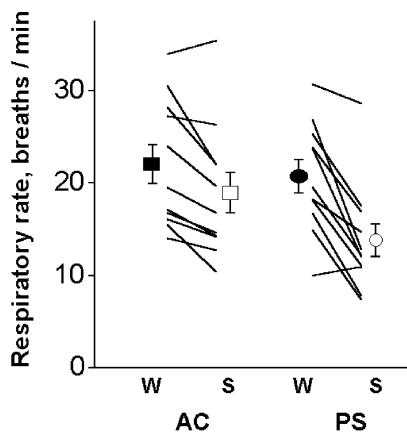
#### Other factors

Factors that contribute to sleep abnormalities in critically ill patients include acute illness [2, 3, 11, 12], pain, light, and patient discomfort [17]. Noxious stimuli that contribute to patient discomfort and arousal include increased respiratory effort [58, 59], hypoxemia [58], and hypercapnia [58]. Swings in intrathoracic pressures are potent stimuli for inducing arousals in healthy subjects [60] and in patients with upper airway resistance syndrome [34].

### Clinical implications

#### Clinical outcomes

Sleep fragmentation may influence morbidity and mortality in critically ill patients. Patients in coma and pa-



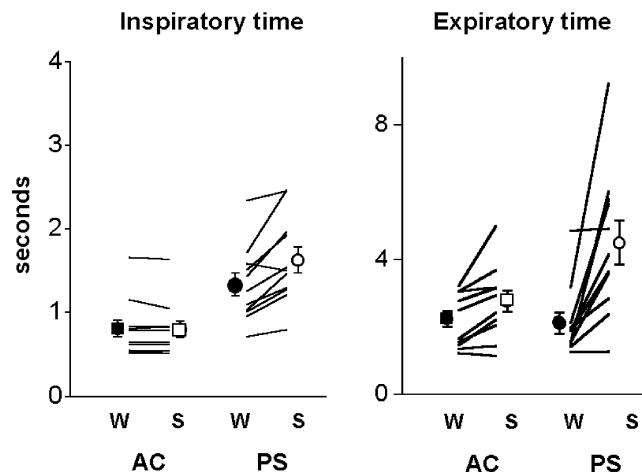
**Fig. 3** Respiratory rate during assist-control ventilation (AC) and pressure support (PS) in 11 critically ill patients. For each mode, the lines connect the mean value for each patient during wakefulness (W, left) and sleep (S, right). Compared with wakefulness, group mean respiratory rate was lower during sleep (closed symbols) than during wakefulness (open symbols). The difference between sleep and wakefulness was greater for pressure support than for assist-control ventilation. (Modified from [15] with permission)

tients who lack well-defined EEG characteristics of stage 2 sleep have higher acute physiological scores than do patients with identifiable but fragmented sleep [5]. Some investigators have reported no association between the acuity of illness and sleep disruption [6]. As such, the contribution of acuity of illness to sleep disturbances is unclear. Animal data suggest that sleep deprivation may lead to death [61]. It is thought that death is unlikely to result with sleep deprivation in human subjects [62, 63], but the consequence of sleep deprivation has been studied only in healthy subjects and not in critically ill patients.

Among 24 patients with post-traumatic coma, 5 of 6 patients who had organized sleep patterns survived as opposed to 3 of 7 patients who had low voltage theta-delta or mixed frequency activity without definable features of sleep; functional outcome was also better in the patients with organized sleep patterns [7]. Freedman and co-workers found that 5 of 22 patients exhibited EEG features of mild to moderate encephalopathy before other features of sepsis manifested [6]; none of the non-septic patients demonstrated such EEG features.

#### Ventilator settings

Physicians typically adjust ventilator settings during the daytime and without knowing whether a patient is asleep or awake. Compared with wakefulness, sleep caused a 33% decrease in respiratory rate during pressure support and a 15% decrease in rate during assist-control (Fig. 3) [15]. The level of pressure support is commonly titrated



**Fig. 4** Inspiratory time (left panel) and expiratory time (right panel) during assist-control ventilation (AC) and pressure support (PS) in 11 critically ill patients. The lines connect the mean value for each patient during wakefulness (W, left) and sleep (S, right). During pressure support, group mean inspiratory time and expiratory time were greater during sleep (closed symbols) than during wakefulness (open symbols). The difference between sleep and wakefulness was greater for pressure support than for assist-control ventilation. (Modified from [15] with permission)

to respiratory rate, which provides reasonable guidance as to a patient's inspiratory effort [64, 65]. If, however, physicians titrate pressure support to respiratory rate while the patient is asleep, patient effort will increase considerably on awakening.

Changes in ventilator settings are commonly based on arterial blood gas measurements. End-tidal CO<sub>2</sub> was greater in 11 critically ill patients during sleep than during wakefulness: by 11% during pressure support and by 5% during assist-control ventilation. Patients who repeatedly slip in and out of sleep display marked fluctuations in end-tidal CO<sub>2</sub>. The coefficient of variation of end-tidal CO<sub>2</sub> was 8.7% during pressure support and 4.7% during assist-control ventilation [15]. In some patients receiving pressure support, end-tidal CO<sub>2</sub> can be as much as 7 mmHg higher during sleep than during wakefulness. Differences in PCO<sub>2</sub> between sleep and wakefulness of this magnitude may cause physicians to change ventilator settings when a change is not necessary. Consequently, under-ventilation or over-ventilation may result [66]. Compared with wakefulness, sleep caused a 23% increase in inspiratory time and a 126% increase in expiratory time in patients receiving pressure support (Fig. 4). The increase in inspiratory time that accompanied change from wakefulness to sleep was also associated with an increase in tidal volume, and the likely accompaniment of hypoxemia may explain the development of apneas during pressure support [67, 68]. These findings indicate that the effect of sleep on breathing pattern and gas exchange has important implications for research on patient-ventilator interaction.

### Cardiorespiratory consequences

In ambulatory patients, sleep fragmentation can result in elevations of arterial blood pressure, elevations of urinary and serum catecholamines, arrhythmias, progression of cardiac failure, and even death [69, 70]. Sleep-disordered breathing might cause similar abnormalities in critically ill patients, although direct evidence is lacking. Apneas and hypopneas cause hypoxemia [16], which, in turn, may produce sympathetic activation and arrhythmias in critically ill patients; evidence on this issue, however, is anecdotal [71] and inconclusive [72].

Sleep fragmentation induced by auditory stimuli can increase nocturnal blood pressure in dogs [73]. In patients who have central sleep apnea, the major cause of oscillations in blood pressure is ventilatory oscillations, with a significant contribution from arousals [73]. These investigations [73, 74] suggest that arousals may elevate nocturnal blood pressure, secondary to increases in sympathetic activity, and contribute to cardiovascular complications [75]. Preliminary data suggests that sleep fragmentation in critically ill patients may be associated with elevations in blood pressure [76], but the effect on morbidity and mortality is unknown.

The effect of sleep deprivation [77] on the ventilatory responses to hypoxia and hypercapnia is controversial [78]. Sleep deprivation has long been believed to depress chemoreceptor function [78]. Spengler and colleagues [78], however, recently found that sleep deprivation did not alter the hypercapnic ventilatory response in healthy subjects. The situation in critically ill patients has not been studied. Blunting of the chemoreceptor response can decrease the ability of the respiratory system to compensate for respiratory loads during or after the withdrawal of mechanical ventilation [68].

At least some postoperative patients experience an increase in REM sleep on the third to fourth postoperative day secondary to the earlier suppression of REM sleep by anesthetics and analgesics [12]. Because REM sleep is characterized by unstable breathing patterns and sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalances, the increase in REM sleep in the early postoperative period may aggravate the risk of postoperative atelectasis, pneumonia, hypoxemia, and cardiovascular morbidity.

### Neurological consequences

Sleep deprivation may contribute to delirium and agitation [19, 79]. In a study of 62 critically ill patients, Helton and colleagues [19] noted that 24% experienced severe sleep deprivation and 16% experienced moderate deprivation. One third of the patients with severe sleep disruption suffered from delirium, 10% of patients with moderate sleep disruption suffered from delirium, but only 3% of patients with adequate sleep had delirium.

The study has limitations. Sleep was assessed at the bedside by nursing staff rather than polysomnography. No intervention was performed, and a cause and effect relationship between sleep deprivation and delirium cannot be inferred. Agitation can cause elevations in plasma catecholamines [21]. Large doses of sedative agents are often used in agitated and delirious patients; when the agitation resolves, however, the sedative agent may remain in adipose tissue and interfere with weaning from mechanical ventilation.

### Immunological and metabolic consequences

Sleep deprivation can unfavorably alter immune function [80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86]. In 42 healthy volunteers, Irwin and co-workers found that sleep deprivation resulted in almost a 50% decrease in natural killer cell activity and a 50% decrease in lymphokine killer cell activity. One night of sleep returned natural killer cell activity to baseline.

Sleep deprivation can promote negative nitrogen balance and increase energy expenditure [62, 63, 87]. In six healthy volunteers, 24 h of sleep deprivation produced a 7% increase in nitrogen excretion. Some subjects experienced as much as a 20% increase in nitrogen excretion. It is not known whether similar changes occur in critically ill patients.

### Long-term consequences

Critical illness may have long-term consequences on sleep [22]. When 329 patients were interviewed 6 months after discharge from an ICU, 223 (67%) reported severe alterations in sleep. The lack of a control group makes it impossible to distinguish the role of critical illness from previous health status, underlying medical diagnosis, persistent disability, or other factors.

### Strategies to decrease sleep disruption

Gabor and co-workers studied the effect of reducing noise in six healthy volunteers while they slept in an ICU [8]. The average level of noise was 51 dB in an open ICU and 43 dB in an isolated single room (the respective peak levels were 65 and 54 dB). Total sleep time was greater in the isolated room than in the open ICU, 9.5 versus 8.2 h, although the number of arousals and awakenings were virtually identical in the two settings (14 to 15 events per hour) [8]. In six healthy volunteers attempting to sleep in a noisy environment, Wallace and co-workers found that use of earplugs increased REM sleep (20 versus 15%) and decreased REM latency (107 versus 148 min), although the number of awaken-

ings was not affected (25 versus 27 per hour). Because only 20% of sleep fragmentation in critically ill patients appears to be attributable to noise [8], reducing noise in the ICU may be of limited value.

Shilo and co-workers undertook a double blind, placebo-controlled study of melatonin in eight critically ill patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [27]. The authors conclude that melatonin achieved greater sleep time and less fragmentation, although the conclusions are not well supported by the data.

## Conclusion

Research into sleep disorders in ambulatory patients over the last 30 years has provided us with a strong set of physiological principles. The time is ripe for applying these principles to critically ill patients. A major challenge, as with most research in critically ill patients, is the difficulty in controlling for confounding influences in order to achieve high fidelity recordings.

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## Magnesium in critical illness: metabolism, assessment, and treatment

flammary events, and mortality are poorly understood. This lack of information on the biology of Mg contrasts with well established correlations between serum total and ionized calcium ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ) concentrations, manifestations of acute  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  deficiency, and the physiological effects of correcting ionized hypocalcemia [9, 10, 11, 12].

This review summarizes key aspects of Mg metabolism in adult intensive care patients, emphasizing the interdependence of Mg homeostasis with that of other cations such as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{K}^+$ . Thereafter we examine the justification for the trend of increasingly frequent measurements of serum total Mg in the critically ill, and how this information is related to emerging data concerning circulating  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ . In this context, the limitations of current treatment recommendations for hypomagnesemia in the ICU are analyzed as well as research developments likely to alter our diagnostic and therapeutic algorithms in the near future. The use of therapeutic doses of Mg independent of hypomagnesemia or titration to serum total Mg levels to treat conditions such as preeclampsia and asthma are covered since this is beyond the scope of this review.

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### Introduction

Magnesium is the second most abundant intracellular cation and the fourth most common cation in the body [1]. Its importance as an essential nutrient has been recognized since 1932, when Kruse et al. [2] reported the effects of acute Mg deficiency in rats. Even recently Mg was considered the “forgotten cation” in clinical practice [3]; however, this is no longer the case [4]. Estimates of Mg deficiency range from 20% to 61% [5, 6, 7], while a recent study found that reductions in total serum Mg on admission are associated with increased mortality [8].

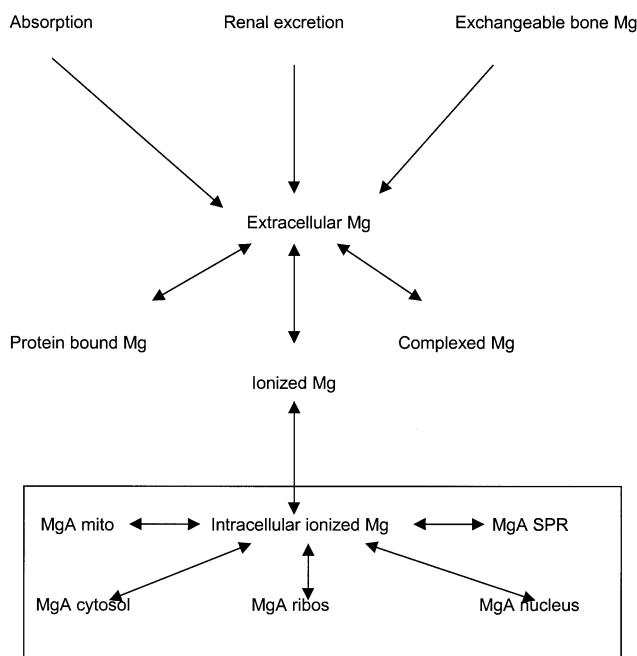
Nonetheless, the relevance of such data to intensive care is problematic. Controlled data are lacking on how circulating total Mg concentrations are related to levels of biologically active ionized Mg ( $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ ). Data are likewise sparse concerning the interplay between serum total and ionized Mg levels during specific critical illnesses and their treatment. In particular, the efficacy of therapeutic Mg supplementation on  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ , organ function, in-

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### Compartmental distribution and metabolism of Mg

The body normally contains 21–28 g Mg [13]. Approximately 53% of total Mg stores are in bone, 27% in muscle, 19% in soft tissues, 0.5% in erythrocytes, and 0.3% in serum [14]. The Mg in muscle, soft tissues, and erythrocytes is considered to be intracellular [1], and mostly bound to chelators such as adenosine triphosphate (ATP), adenosine diphosphate (ADP), proteins, RNA, DNA, and citrate [14]. Although only 5–10% of intracellular Mg is ionized, this fraction is essential for regulating intracellular Mg homeostasis [15] (Fig. 1).

Traditionally, extracellular Mg in serum was considered to be 33% protein bound, 7% complexed to citrate,  $\text{PO}_4^{2-}$ , and  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  [16], and 55% circulating in the diva-



**Fig. 1** Mg homeostasis. Extracellular Mg levels are maintained via absorption, renal excretion, and bone contribution. Extracellular Mg comprises protein-bound, complexed, and ionized fractions. Ionized extracellular Mg is in exchanging equilibrium with the intracellular ionized Mg fraction. MgA cytosol, MgA ribos, MgA nucleus, MgA SPR, MgA mito refer to Mg bound in the cytosol, ribosomes, nucleus, sarcoplasmic reticulum, and mitochondria, respectively

lent ionized form ( $Mg^{2+}$ ). However, the newer methods of ion-selective Mg electrodes, atomic absorption spectroscopy, and ultrafiltration indicate that serum Mg is 67% ionized, 19% protein bound, and 14% complexed [17]. Standard clinical determinations of serum total Mg reflect all three forms. Of note, protein-bound and complexed Mg are unavailable for most biochemical processes [1]. The important issue of the dynamics of equilibration among the various states of extracellular Mg has not been extensively studied. Since serum contains only 0.3% of total body Mg stores, serum total Mg measurements poorly reflect total body status. Serum total Mg concentrations normally average 1.7–2.3 mg/dl (1.4–2.1 mEq/l) [13], depending on the laboratory and measurement technique. Mg concentrations are commonly expressed in units of milligrams, millimoles, or milliequivalents; for conversion one can use the following formula: 1 g Mg sulfate contains 98 mg = 4.06 mmol = 8.12 mEq elemental Mg.

Daily Mg intake in adults normally averages 6–10 mg/kg [18]. Absorption occurs primarily in the jejunum and ileum [19]. Several lines of evidence suggest that absorption involves a transcellular, saturable process involving facilitated diffusion and a passive intercellular mechanism mediated by cationic electrochemical gradi-

ents and solvent drag [20]. Although 30–40% of dietary Mg is absorbed [19, 20], factors controlling intestinal absorption are unclear. An inverse curvilinear relationship was shown in healthy volunteers between Mg intake and its fractional absorption ranging from 65% absorption at low intake to 11% at high intake [21]. Thus, estimating the amount of oral Mg salts to correct hypomagnesemia in ICU patients who commonly have ileus and other forms of gastrointestinal dysfunction is problematic. The effects of vitamin D and parathyroid hormone (PTH) on enteral Mg absorption are minor [22].

Renal function is central to Mg homeostasis. Of the approx. 2.4 g Mg filtered per day (i.e., the 77% of total serum Mg that is not protein bound), 5% (120 mg) is normally excreted in the urine [23]. Glomerular filtration and tubular reabsorption both influence renal Mg handling [24]. Specifically, 20–30% of filtered Mg is reabsorbed in the proximal tubule and 60% in the thick ascending loop of Henlé [25]. This is where ionic regulators, hormones, and medications affect Mg excretion. Mg reabsorption in the thick ascending loop of Henlé is linked with NaCl transport and is therefore influenced by tubular flow [24, 25]. Conservation of Mg by normal kidneys during Mg deprivation may decrease fractional excretion to less than 0.5% (12 mg/day) [23]. Conversely, the kidneys increase excretion of Mg to approximate the filtered load during increased intake or excessive Mg administration [26]. During renal failure the fractional excretion of Mg progressively increases, and normal serum total Mg levels are maintained until the later stages when hypermagnesemia supervenes [27].

### Mg homeostasis and compensatory mechanisms

Mg homeostasis involves interaction between three organ systems: kidneys, small bowel, and bone (Fig. 1). Acute Mg deprivation increases tubular reabsorption and intestinal absorption [28]. The mechanisms for such compensatory alterations in Mg transport are not fully understood. Several reports indicate a lack of correlation of these alterations with serum total Mg concentrations [29, 30, 31]. In Mg deficient rats a fall in urinary Mg excretion was found to occur without changes in plasma total Mg concentrations [28]. This adaptation was rapid (within 5 h) and specific (without changes in  $Na^+$  or  $Ca^{2+}$  reabsorption). If Mg deprivation continues, exchangeable bone Mg starts contributing to extracellular Mg levels [32]. Up to 30% of bone Mg is rapidly exchangeable [33].

The threshold of negative Mg balance that triggers compensatory mechanisms is not known. Even so, ionized intracellular Mg [ $Mg^{2+}$ ]<sub>i</sub> appears to be the ultimate regulatory signal [28]. [ $Mg^{2+}$ ]<sub>i</sub> and intracellular bound Mg are exchangeable and are in equilibrium with extracellular  $Mg^{2+}$  [34]. Thus, ionized and bound intracellular

Mg represent buffers whose chief function appears to be maintaining constancy of the intracellular concentration of free  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$ . In human erythrocytes and other cells an increase in  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  by Mg loading is associated with Mg efflux via the  $Na^{2+}/Mg^{2+}$  antiport until  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  is normalized. Furthermore, reductions in  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  stimulate cationic diffusion down a concentration gradient from higher levels of extracellular  $Mg^{2+}$  [35, 36]. Consequently, Mg homeostasis is regulated chiefly by  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  which is in equilibrium with both intracellular bound Mg and extracellular  $Mg^{2+}$ . Neither the magnitude nor the efficiency of these compensatory mechanisms is known for critically ill patients, in whom counterregulatory hormone release, insulin administration, and de novo renal and gastrointestinal dysfunction are common.

### Biochemical, biological, and physiological effects of Mg

Mg is important in physiological processes involving energy storage, transfer, and utilization [13, 37]. Mg complexed to ATP is a substrate for signal-transducing enzymes including phosphatases and phosphokinases on the plasma membrane and within intracellular compartments. Enzymatic reactions involving ATP require  $Mg^{2+}$ , which neutralizes the negative charge on ATP to facilitate binding to enzymes and assists hydrolysis of the terminal  $PO_4^{2-}$  bond [38]. Intracellular  $Mg^{2+}$  regulates intermediary metabolism by activating rate-limiting glycolytic and tricarboxylic acid cycle enzymes [39].  $Mg^{2+}$ -ATPases include  $Mg^{2+}-(Na^+-K^+)$  ATPase,  $Mg^{2+}-(HCO_3^-)$  ATPase, and  $Ca^{2+}-Mg^{2+}$  ATPase, which are involved in  $Na^+$ , proton, and  $Ca^{2+}$  transport, respectively [40]. Mg indirectly affects protein synthesis by four mechanisms: (a) facilitation of nucleic acid polymerization, (b) enhanced binding of ribosomes to mRNA, (c) acceleration of the synthesis and degradation of DNA, and (d) regulation of protein:DNA interactions and thus transcriptional activity [41, 42]. Adenylate cyclase also requires Mg to generate the intracellular second messenger cAMP [40].

Intracellular  $Mg^{2+}$  significantly affects  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $K^+$  metabolism. As a divalent cation  $Mg^{2+}$  competes with  $Ca^{2+}$  for membrane-binding sites and modulates  $Ca^{2+}$  binding and release from the sarcoplasmic reticulum [43]. Complementary effects include maintenance of low resting levels of intracellular  $Ca^{2+}$ , thereby modulating muscle contraction by noncompetitive inhibition of inositol 1,4,5-triphosphate gated  $Ca^{2+}$  channels [44]. Calcium metabolism is controlled chiefly through PTH; substantial evidence indicates that Mg modulates Ca balance by its actions on PTH itself [45]. For example, impaired PTH secretion associated with hypomagnesemia results in hypocalcemia. This is attributed to reduced Mg-dependent activation of adenylate cyclase in parathyroid tissue [46, 47]. Whether Mg deficiency also contributes

to skeletal muscle resistance to PTH is controversial [48].

$Mg^{2+}$  regulates  $K^+$  transport via the  $Na^+-K^+$ -ATPase system as a cofactor. This action influences  $Na^+$  and  $K^+$  extracellular fluxes, which determine the electrical potential across cell membranes [49].  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  blocks outward movement of  $K^+$  through  $K^+$  channels in cardiac cells. Decreases in  $[Mg^{2+}]_i$  cause excessive outward movement of  $K^+$  even as intracellular  $K^+$  falls, thereby inducing depolarization [50]. This critical role of  $Mg^{2+}$  to maintain intracellular  $K^+$  concentrations is termed “inward rectification” [51]. Mg deficiency also impairs  $K^+-Na^+-Cl^-$  cotransport [52].

In the nervous system Mg has a depressant effect at the synapses; this is related to competition with calcium in the stimulus-secretion coupling processes in transmitter release. The best described of these is presynaptic inhibition of acetylcholine release at the neuromuscular junction [53]. The action of Mg as an anticonvulsant is related to noncompetitive blockade of *N*-methyl-D-aspartate receptors. These are a group of glutamate receptors, stimulation of which leads to excitatory postsynaptic potentials causing seizures [54].

Overall, Mg deficiency has the potential to impair oxidative phosphorylation, protein metabolism, and transmembrane electrolyte flux in cardiac and neural tissues.

### Assessment of Mg status

Assessing Mg status in the critically ill beyond serum total Mg levels is difficult. No single laboratory test tracks total body Mg stores. In all, three groups of tests are available: (a) estimates of tissue Mg using concentrations in serum, red blood cells, blood mononuclear cells, or muscle; (b) metabolic assessments of Mg balance encompassing isotopic analyses and evaluation of renal Mg excretion and retention, and (c) determination of  $Mg^{2+}$  levels which utilize fluorescent probes, nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, or ion-selective electrodes (ISE).

Measuring total Mg concentrations in serum rather than plasma has been preferred because additives such as anticoagulants may be contaminated with Mg or otherwise affect the assay. For example, citrate binds  $Ca^{2+}$  as well as  $Mg^{2+}$  to affect fluorometric (8-hydroxyquinoline) and colorimetric procedures for Mg estimation [55]. As indicated above, serum total Mg levels reflect  $Mg^{2+}$ , the protein-bound Mg fraction, and Mg complexed to anions, and each component of the total value may change independently and in a nonlinear manner with respect to the other Mg fractions.

Most clinical laboratories report serum total Mg concentrations using colorimetric methods with calmagite or methylthymol blue as the chromophore [56]. As men-

tioned above, the chief limitation is that serum concentrations represent only 0.3% of total body Mg content [14]. Moreover, with the exception of bone, serum total Mg concentrations are not correlated with other tissue pools of Mg [57]. As for Ca, normal total Mg levels may coexist with ionized hypomagnesemia and vice versa [58]. Red blood cell Mg determinations have no advantage over serum levels and also are not correlated with other tissue fractions [57]. In normal subjects there is no correlation among Mg levels in mononuclear cells compared with serum or erythrocytes [59]. In a prospective controlled study measuring skeletal muscle Mg concentrations in 32 ICU patients with respiratory failure no correlation was found between serum total and muscle Mg concentrations [60]. Lower muscle Mg levels were associated with reduced intracellular K<sup>+</sup> levels, a higher incidence of ventricular extrasystoles, and a longer ICU stay.

Physiological assessments of Mg balance require steady-state conditions for accurate results, conditions that are infrequent in the critically ill. A 24-h urine collection for renal Mg excretion takes into account the circadian rhythm of cationic urinary losses [61]. However, existence of this rhythm during critical illness is unknown. Even so, a 24-h Mg excretion rate of less than 12 mg/day is acceptable evidence of Mg deficiency in the presence of serum total hypomagnesemia and normal renal function [23]. The Mg tolerance test has been used for many years as a fairly reliable means of assessing total body Mg status in patients at risk of hypomagnesemia [62]. Subjects with normal Mg balance and renal function excrete most of a parenterally administered Mg load within 24 h [28, 62]. A generally accepted protocol includes: (a) a baseline 24-h urine collection for Mg, followed immediately by (b) an infusion of 2.4 mg Mg per kilogram of lean body weight in 50 ml 5% dextrose over 4 h, and (c) a second 24-h urine collection. Differences in Mg content between the two urine collections represent the retained Mg fraction. Retention of more than 20% of administered Mg is suggestive of Mg deficiency, whereas retention of more than 50% is confirmatory [40]. This test is contraindicated when serum creatinine exceeds 200 µmol/l. Furthermore, drugs or conditions producing renal Mg wasting invalidate the results. Using the Mg loading test, serum ionized Mg levels were found to be insensitive markers of Mg deficiency in 44 ICU patients without renal insufficiency [63]. However, confounding variables, such as the use of diuretics, prevent any firm conclusions to be drawn.

A major advance in evaluating Mg deficiency is the ability to measure Mg<sup>2+</sup>. In 1989 Raju et al. [64] modified the calcium fluoroprobe fura-2 to improve selectivity for Mg<sup>2+</sup>. The resulting compound furaptra (mag fura-2) exhibits a shift in the peak excitation wavelength for fluorescence when bound to Mg<sup>2+</sup> or Ca<sup>2+</sup>. The change in fluorescence corresponds to Mg<sup>2+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentra-

tions weighted by their respective dissociation constants. For Mg<sup>2+</sup>, these probes work well within the cell. Other fluorescent probes for Mg<sup>2+</sup> have been described [65]. Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy estimates Mg<sup>2+</sup> noninvasively. Although several isotopes (<sup>19</sup>F-, <sup>25</sup>Mg<sup>2+</sup>, and <sup>31</sup>P<sup>-2</sup>) have been used to estimate Mg<sup>2+</sup>, the α- and β-phosphate moieties of ATP have been used most frequently [66].

Three ISEs for Mg<sup>2+</sup> determination are currently available: (a) the NOVA 8 analyzer (NOVA, Waltham, Mass., USA); (b) the Microlyte 6 analyzer (Kone, Espoo, Finland); and (c) the AVL 988/4 analyzer (AVL, Schaffhausen, Switzerland). In May 1993 the United States Food and Drug Administration approved the NOVA 8 electrode for clinical use, and most studies of Mg<sup>2+</sup> have used the NOVA 8 instrument. These ISEs employ ionophores and neutral carrier-based membranes designed to function in the presence of Ca<sup>2+</sup> and other cations. Mg<sup>2+</sup>-specific ISEs yield rapid results on whole blood, plasma, and serum using samples between 100–200 µl. Ionized Mg concentrations in healthy subjects using the NOVA 8 average 0.54–0.67 mmol/l [58, 67]. Serum reference intervals for the Kone and AVL analyzers are 0.47–0.57 mmol/l and 0.55–0.63 mmol/l, respectively [68]. No gender-related differences in Mg<sup>2+</sup> have been described [67]. To date ISEs have been found to be selective for Mg<sup>2+</sup>; physiological concentrations of Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup>, K<sup>+</sup>, H<sup>+</sup> and NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> have negligible effects. Therefore the precision of these analyzers is suitable for determining Mg<sup>2+</sup> in intensive care [67].

The NOVA 8 and AVL analyzers correct signals from the Mg<sup>2+</sup> electrode for concurrent Ca<sup>2+</sup>. Calculations of Mg<sup>2+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> are normalized to a pH of 7.4 in the NOVA 8 instrument, which also estimates Na<sup>+</sup>, K<sup>+</sup>, Ca<sup>2+</sup>, hematocrit, and pH [69]. The binding capacity and affinity of albumin for Mg<sup>2+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> varies with pH [70]; hence the Mg<sup>2+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> levels are pH dependent. Because of pH changes during specimen storage, measured Mg<sup>2+</sup> can be reported as the Mg<sup>2+</sup> at the pH of the blood sample (preferably) or as Mg<sup>2+</sup> normalized to a pH of 7.4.

### Mg deficiency in intensive care

Ideally, Welt and Gitelman's [71] definition of hypomagnesemia as "a reduction in total body magnesium content" defines true Mg deficiency. Unfortunately, this definition of Mg deficiency is not in keeping with commonly available laboratory technology. In spite of its imperfections serum total Mg is still used as the standard for defining hypomagnesemia in intensive care patients.

## Clinical manifestations of hypomagnesemia

Most hypomagnesemia in intensive care is asymptomatic. In theory, symptoms and signs occur when the serum total Mg concentrations fall below 1.2 mg/dl (0.5 mmol/l) [72], as summarized below:

- Neuromuscular manifestations
  - Positive Chvostek's sign
  - Positive Trousseau's sign
  - Carpopedal spasm (tetany)
  - Muscle cramps
  - Muscle fasciculations and tremor
  - Muscle weakness
- Neurological manifestations
  - Convulsions
  - Nystagmus
  - Athetoid movements
  - Apathy
  - Delirium
  - Coma
- Cardiac manifestations
  - Supraventricular arrhythmias
  - Ventricular arrhythmias
  - Torsades de pointes
  - Enhanced sensitivity to digitalis intoxication
- Electrolyte disturbances
  - Hypokalemia
  - Hypocalcemia

However, manifestations of hypomagnesemia may depend more on the rate of development of the deficiency, on serum ionized rather than total hypomagnesemia, or on tissue Mg deficits rather than on circulating levels [73]. Consequently symptoms and signs ascribed to Mg deficiency may be absent even with severe hypomagnesemia (serum total Mg levels <0.8 mg/dl) [72]. Such dissociations between serum total Mg levels and clinical findings make it difficult to infer total body Mg deficiency, the need for correction of hypomagnesemia, and the physiological benefit of such correction in individual patients.

### Neuromuscular manifestations of hypomagnesemia: relationship to hypocalcemia

Serum total hypomagnesemia is usually corrected because of concerns over neuromuscular irritability (e.g., positive Chvostek's and Trousseau's signs, tremors, fasciculations, and tetany) or weakness [74]. In particular, the possibility of weakness and resultant delays in venti-

latory weaning attributable to hypomagnesemia have resulted in the widespread practice of frequent measurements and vigorous normalization of serum total Mg levels in ventilated patients. However, no controlled data support this practice, and its putative physiological benefit to respiratory muscle function remains obscure. Indeed, neuromuscular manifestations of serum total hypomagnesemia may be due more to concomitant hypocalcemia, even though tetany attributable solely to hypomagnesemia can occur independently of reduced serum total Ca levels [75]. Overall, neuromuscular irritability and weakness appear to be related to the combined actions of ionized hypomagnesemia and ionized hypocalcemia on the neuromuscular apparatus. Hypocalcemia does not usually develop until serum total Mg is below 1.2 mg/dl; serum total hypocalcemia occurs in one-third of hypomagnesemic medical ICU patients [76]. Hypocalcemia is usually refractory to Ca repletion unless Mg is first administered [76, 77].

### Neurological manifestations of hypomagnesemia

Reported neurological manifestations of hypomagnesemia include convulsions, athetoid movements, nystagmus, apathy, delirium, and coma [40]. As mentioned above, the anticonvulsant effect of Mg appears to be via a voltage-gated antagonist action at the *N*-methyl-D-aspartate receptor [54].

### Cardiac electrophysiology, hypomagnesemia, and hypokalemia

The frequency and pathogenesis of cardiac arrhythmias during hypomagnesemia [78] are hard to establish because coexisting hypokalemia is common. Whang et al. [79] reported hypokalemia in 42% of hypomagnesemic patients. Such hypokalemia is also refractory to treatment unless Mg is first repleted [74]. Although Mg per se does not participate in the production of the cardiac action potential [80], Watanabe and Dreifus [81] showed that Mg's effects on cardiac transmembrane potentials varied in perfused rat hearts according to extracellular K<sup>+</sup> levels. Increases or decreases in Mg levels with normal extracellular K<sup>+</sup> concentrations causes minor electrophysiological changes. Alterations in serum total Mg concentrations are unlikely to destabilize sinus rhythm unless accompanied by changes in other cations [80].

Serum total Mg levels below 0.7 mmol/l are associated with electrocardiographic changes indistinguishable from hypokalemia-related effects, including ST segment depression, flattened T waves, and prolongation of PR and QT/QTc intervals [38]. Arrhythmias associated with serum total hypomagnesemia include premature atrial contractions, atrial fibrillation, multifocal atrial tachycardia,

dia, premature ventricular contractions, ventricular tachycardia, and ventricular fibrillation [82, 83]. Hypomagnesemia promotes digitalis-induced arrhythmias [84]. The mechanisms are unclear but include: (a) increased myocardial uptake of digoxin, (b) augmented inhibitory action of digoxin on  $\text{Na}^+/\text{K}^+$ -ATPase causing a reduction in intracellular  $\text{K}^+$  [82], and (c) loss of the membrane-stabilizing effect  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  on the myocardial cell membranes [84]. Mg therapy is recommended for torsades de pointes [85]. Despite these associations of low serum total Mg levels with cardiac electrophysiological changes, purported links between low Mg and arrhythmias do not confirm a cause and effect relationship. Lack of a standard by which to define a Mg-deficient state, co-existence of other electrolyte abnormalities, varying methods of arrhythmia monitoring, and inability to distinguish between spontaneous and drug-induced arrhythmia termination are all factors [80]. Moreover, a prospective uncontrolled study of 23 heart failure patients found no correlation between serum total Mg and myocardial Mg concentrations [86].

### **Causes of Mg deficiency in intensive care**

Singly or combined, Mg deficiency in intensive care has three main causes – (a) reduced intestinal absorption, (b) increased renal losses, and (c) compartmental redistribution, as detailed below.

Gastrointestinal causes include:

- Nutritional disturbances
  - Inadequate intake
  - Mg-free fluids and total parenteral nutrition
  - Refeeding syndrome
- Reduced absorption
  - Malabsorption syndromes
  - Short bowel syndrome
  - Chronic diarrhea
- Increased intestinal losses
  - Intestinal and biliary fistulae
  - Prolonged nasogastric suction
- Pancreatitis

Causes related to renal Mg wasting include:

- Intrinsic tubular defect
  - Interstitial nephropathy
  - Postobstructive diuresis
  - Diuretic phase of ATN
  - Postrenal transplantation

- Drug-induced renal Mg wasting
  - Loop and thiazide diuretics
  - Cisplatin
  - Cyclosporine A
  - Aminoglycosides
  - Amphotericin B
  - Pentamidine and foscarnet
  - Colony-stimulating factor therapy

- Hypophosphatemia
- Hypercalcemia/hypercalciuria

Endocrine causes include:

- Hyperaldosteronism
- Hyperparathyroidism
- Hyperthyroidism
- Syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone
- Diabetic ketoacidosis
- Alcoholic ketoacidosis

Causes related to the redistribution of Mg include:

- Acute pancreatitis
- Administration of epinephrine
- “Hungry bone” syndrome
- Massive blood transfusion
- Acute respiratory alkalosis

Other causes include:

- Cardiopulmonary bypass
- Severe burns
- Excessive sweating
- Chronic alcoholism and alcoholic withdrawal

Nearly all data concerning hypomagnesemia during critical illness comes from measurements of circulating total Mg. These do not shed light on the causes of Mg deficiency and likely underestimate ionized hypomagnesemia and total body Mg depletion.

### **Gastrointestinal causes**

Prolonged administration of Mg-free parenteral nutrition formulae and other intravenous fluids can precipitate Mg deficiency, especially in patients with preexisting marginal stores of Mg [87]. Vomiting and nasogastric suctioning further contribute to Mg depletion [48], since the Mg content of upper intestinal fluids is about 1 mEq/l. Diarrheal fluids and fistula drainage contain up to 15 mEq/l total Mg ions [88]. Hemorrhagic pancreatitis is an additional cause of acute hypomagnesemia with hypocalcemia due to formation of Mg and Ca fatty acid soaps in sites of tissue necrosis [89].

## Renal causes

Renal Mg wasting is traditionally diagnosed when the 24 h urinary Mg excretion exceeds 24 mg in the presence of hypomagnesemia as assessed by serum total Mg levels [23]. Random or “spot” urinary tests for Mg are interesting albeit unvalidated diagnostic tests. Renal Mg wasting has been reported with tubulointerstitial renal diseases, postobstructive diuresis, the diuretic phase of acute tubular necrosis, and following renal transplantation [90]. Since Mg absorption in the thick ascending loop of Henlé depends on the positive transmembrane potential created by NaCl absorption, alterations in NaCl transport by loop diuretics, 0.9% NaCl infusion, or osmotic diuresis promote Mg excretion. Loop diuretics (furosemide, bumetamide, and ethacrynic acid) are potent inhibitors of Mg reabsorption and are a common cause of hypomagnesemia in the ICU. Thiazide diuretics act on the distal tubule, where less than 5% of Mg is absorbed. Short-term administration of thiazides does not produce significant renal Mg wasting, whereas long-term administration may produce substantial Mg deficiency [40].

Several drugs cause excessive renal losses of Mg. Cisplatin causes hypomagnesemia in more than 50% of treated patients [91]; the incidence increases with the cumulative dose. Likewise, aminoglycosides induce magnesuria; 4.5% of 200 patients treated with 400 courses of aminoglycosides developed hypomagnesemia [92]. The total dose of aminoglycoside treatment in these studies varied from 1.3–40 g and recovery from hypomagnesemia varied from 2–8 weeks. A recent prospective study showed ionized hypomagnesemia secondary to renal Mg wasting in cystic fibrosis patients treated with a 2-week course of 33 mg/kg amikacin daily and 250 mg/kg cefazidime daily [93], although no clinical correlation with ionized hypomagnesemia was performed. Amphotericin B causes mild and reversible hypomagnesemia [94]. Barton et al [94] reported that reversal of amphotericin B-induced renal Mg wasting could take as long as 1 year following treatment. As with amphotericin B, cyclosporine A causes Mg deficiency secondary to defects in renal tubular function [95]. Parenteral pentamidine has also been implicated in hypomagnesemia secondary to renal Mg wasting [96].

Hypophosphatemia is common during intensive care, particularly in insulin-dependent diabetics and during Gram-negative bacterial sepsis [97]. Although hypophosphatemia promotes magnesuria, the mechanism is unclear [79]. Serum total Mg levels are inversely correlated with the fasting blood sugar level in diabetics in whom glycosuria, ketoaciduria, and hypophosphatemia contribute to renal Mg wasting [98]. Primary [99] and secondary [100] hyperaldosteronism are associated with renal Mg wasting secondary to volume expansion, causing increased tubular flow rates and decreased NaCl reabsorption [99]. The exact mechanism, however, remains

controversial. Other hormonal conditions associated with hypomagnesemia are the syndrome of inappropriate anti-diuretic hormone secretion [101] and hyperthyroidism [102].

## Redistribution of Mg

“Hungry bone syndrome” after parathyroidectomy [103] or diffuse osteoblastic metastasis [104] can result in hypomagnesemic, hypocalcemic tetany from osseous deposition of Mg and Ca. Epinephrine and other β-agonists (e.g., salbutamol) cause transient hypomagnesemia in healthy subjects [105]. This is thought to occur from uptake of Mg into adipose tissue as fatty acids are released. Release of fatty acids into the blood may also lead to the formation of insoluble fatty acid-Mg<sup>2+</sup> and fatty acid-Ca<sup>2+</sup> complexes [40]. Massive blood transfusion (>10 U/24 h) may cause hypomagnesemia from the chelating effects of citrate [106]. Hypomagnesemia occurs during and after cardiopulmonary bypass surgery [84, 107]. Potential mechanisms include hemodilution from large-volume infusion of Mg-free fluids, removal of Mg by the bypass pump, and catecholamine-induced intracellular Mg shifts, and binding to free fatty acids [107]. A retrospective study of 30 patients undergoing elective cardiopulmonary bypass surgery demonstrated ionized hypomagnesemia in 73% [108]. Of note, the relationship between Mg<sup>2+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> during CPB was variable, and Ca<sup>2+</sup> levels did not predict Mg<sup>2+</sup> levels [108]. Significant hypomagnesemia (i.e., serum total Mg level <1.40±0.15 mEq/l) occurs in up to 30% of alcoholics. Multiple mechanisms are likely, including decreased Mg intake accompanying poor nutritional status, vomiting, chronic pancreatitis-induced steatorrhea, and Mg malabsorption [109].

Collectively, the above data indicate that hypomagnesemia (serum total Mg level <1.5 mEq/l) may have multiple causes in the ICU patient. Even so, three critical questions remain: (a) to what extent does ionized hypomagnesemia parallel reductions in serum total Mg levels and in total body Mg stores? (b) Does Mg replacement to correct levels of serum total Mg also correct ionized hypomagnesemia? (c) Is correction of serum total or ionized hypomagnesemia associated with definable clinical changes in biochemistry, electrophysiology, inflammatory responses or organ function? Until the answers to these questions are forthcoming, we may be spending considerable effort and expense merely to make serum total Mg levels “look better.”

## Mg, sepsis, and shock

Novel immunoregulatory effects of Mg deficiency and supplementation are increasingly reported [110, 111,

112]. Such data suggest that reductions in circulating and intracellular Mg have important, albeit clinically occult immunomodulatory consequences during severe sepsis and shock states. By enhancing generation of reactive O<sub>2</sub> species [111] and cytokine biosynthesis, hypomagnesemia can promote inflammatory tissue injury [112].

Altura et al. [113] proposed that circulating free Mg<sup>2+</sup> ions are “natural” Ca<sup>2+</sup> antagonists that modulate lethal cellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> entry during shock. Lower Mg<sup>2+</sup> concentrations have been found to be correlated with efflux of Ca<sup>2+</sup> from the sarcoplasmic reticulum of frog myocytes over a 0.3- to 3-mmol concentration range of Mg<sup>2+</sup> [114]. A direct effect of low [Mg<sup>2+</sup>]<sub>i</sub> to increase the voltage-gated calcium current (I<sub>Ca</sub>) was implicated. Based on this and other reports [115], Mg<sup>2+</sup> deficiency may promote abnormal cellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> entry during sepsis; this may in turn increase free cytosolic and mitochondrial Ca<sup>2+</sup> to cause cell death. In support of this, intracellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> has been reported to increase as tissue Mg<sup>2+</sup> levels decline in a rat endotoxic shock model [116]. Concomitant depression of mitochondrial respiration was restored after Mg<sup>2+</sup> supplementation.

Since considerable intracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup> is complexed to ATP, sepsis, or ischemia/reperfusion-induced ATP hydrolysis or falls in ATP production release intracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup> ions. Subsequently [Mg<sup>2+</sup>]<sub>i</sub> concentrations rise, and Mg<sup>2+</sup> effluxes from cells [115, 117]. Three negative consequences may result: (a) impaired Na<sup>+</sup>-K<sup>+</sup> ATPase pump activity, (b) reduced inwardly rectifying K<sup>+</sup> ion channels, and (c) dysfunctional cell membrane and sarcolemmal Ca<sup>2+</sup> ion channels [61]. These changes may partly account for the increased lethality of endotoxemia seen in rats during hypomagnesemia as well as the protective effects of Mg replacement from endotoxin challenge [118].

Mg<sup>2+</sup> ions modulate key immunological functions, including macrophage activation, leukocyte adherence, and bactericidal activity [119], granulocyte oxidative burst, lymphocyte proliferation, and endotoxin binding to monocytes [118]. In Mg-deficiency models time-dependent increases are seen in circulating interleukin-1, tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$ , interferon- $\gamma$ , substance P, and calcitonin gene related peptide [110, 112, 120]. Such effects may result from altered DNA binding of transcription factors notable for their suppression of inflammatory cytokine gene activation, including the cyclic AMP response element binding protein [42]. Likewise, Mak et al. [121] reported overproduction of nitric oxide in an Mg-deficient rat model. In that report increased nitric oxide production was considered secondary to Mg deficiency-related stimulation of inducible nitric oxide synthase and activation of Ca-sensitive nitric oxide synthase from increased intracellular Ca<sup>2+</sup>. Cytotoxic effects of NO include those resulting from its combination with superoxide to form peroxynitrite [121]. Inhibition of mitochondrial respiration, interference with the O<sub>2</sub>

carrying ability of hemoglobin and myoglobin due to interaction with heme proteins, and inhibition of enzymes containing heme and nonheme iron-sulfur centers all contribute to toxicity [122]. Overall, emerging data showing interrelated links among biochemical, physiological, and immunoregulatory effects of Mg deficiency during sepsis and shock suggest the corollary thesis that titrated Mg supplementation can alter outcomes. Further experimental and clinical data are needed to confirm this notion.

### **Ionized Mg and intensive care**

Serum total Mg levels are not correlated with serum Mg<sup>2+</sup> in the critically ill because of accompanying variations in plasma protein concentrations, acid-base balance, metabolic derangements, and drugs that affect Mg balance [58, 123]. Kulpmann et al. [123] showed that reduced serum total Mg concentrations may reflect “pseudohypomagnesemia” from hypoalbuminemia when concomitant Mg<sup>2+</sup> concentrations are normal. Such findings have led to the suggestion that the terms hypo-, normo-, and hypermagnesemia should be restricted to Mg<sup>2+</sup> levels. Of note, [Mg<sup>2+</sup>]<sub>i</sub> levels are correlated well with serum Mg<sup>2+</sup> by <sup>31</sup>P-nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy [124]. In aortic endothelium [Mg<sup>2+</sup>]<sub>i</sub> levels change within 5 min of increasing extracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup>, suggesting that extracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup> dynamically equilibrates with [Mg<sup>2+</sup>]<sub>i</sub> [125]. Additional studies are needed to confirm whether extracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup> accurately tracks total body Mg balance. In spite of in vitro studies demonstrating the superiority of ionized Mg measurements over total Mg estimations; few studies have attempted to demonstrate the importance of measuring ionized Mg levels in the critical care setting and to examine the correlation of ionized hypomagnesemia with clinical manifestations and outcomes.

Salem et al. [126] measured Mg<sup>2+</sup> and serum total Mg concentrations in 180 critically ill patients. Serum total Mg values were sensitive (75%) but not specific (38%) in predicting ionized hypomagnesemia. Increased supraventricular and ventricular dysrhythmias, seizures, hypotension, and death were associated with ionized hypomagnesemia (normal range 0.52–0.60 mmol/l). Recently, Huijgen and colleagues [127] evaluated the relationships between serum Mg<sup>2+</sup>, total body Mg estimated by Mg content in blood mononuclear cells and erythrocytes, serum albumin, and 30-day mortality in 115 critically ill patients. A normal serum Mg<sup>2+</sup> was found in 71% of patients with total serum hypomagnesemic values. Moreover, neither total nor ionized Mg measurement was correlated with cellular Mg levels or with outcome. With respect to the cardiovascular effects of hypomagnesemia, Kasaoka et al. [128] found that supraventricular and ventricular extrasystoles decreased by 50% and ventricular

tachycardia was abolished by a 0.15 mmol/kg intravenous bolus of Mg sulfate ( $MgSO_4$ ) over 10 min, which increased serum  $Mg^{2+}$  from  $0.35 \pm 0.06$  mmol/l to  $0.54 \pm 0.09$  mmol/l.  $MgSO_4$  had no effect in patients with a normal serum  $Mg^{2+}$ . The ratio of  $Mg^{2+}$  to  $Ca^{2+}$  as a modulator of vascular tone also increased after intravenous  $MgSO_4$  and was thought to contribute to the antiarrhythmic effect. Bertschat et al. [129] determined serum  $Mg^{2+}$  levels on days 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 after myocardial infarction in 42 patients, in addition to concomitant serum total Mg, free fatty acids,  $Ca^{2+}$ , and total Ca. Compared with serum total Mg concentrations,  $Mg^{2+}$  levels fell on the 1st day of myocardial infarction and were inversely correlated with serum free fatty acids. The ionized hypomagnesemia was attributed to  $\beta$ -adrenergic induced lipolysis and binding of  $Mg^{2+}$  by fatty acids. Since the benefit of intravenous  $MgSO_4$  during acute myocardial infarction is not established, the authors suggest that serum  $Mg^{2+}$  rather than total Mg be measured in coronary care patients, and that those with ionized hypomagnesemia be treated [129].

Frankel et al. [130] noted a poor correlation between serum total and  $Mg^{2+}$  values in 113 trauma patients, although injury severity or blood ethanol levels did not predict ionized hypomagnesemia. It has been hypothesized that decreased serum  $Mg^{2+}$  levels after trauma result from increases in circulating catecholamines and corticosteroids, and to Mg redistribution within injured tissues [131]. Ionized hypomagnesemia occurs after experimental head trauma [132] and in brain-injured patients [133]. In vivo animal studies have shown that pre- or posttreatment with  $MgCl_2$  15 min after cerebral injury restores brain  $Mg^{2+}$  levels, improves motor function [134], attenuates cognitive deficits [135], and reduces cerebral edema [136]. In a traumatic brain injury rat model Bareyre et al. [137] studied serum  $Mg^{2+}$  levels 24 h postinjury and neuromotor outcome after 1 and 2 weeks. Supplemental Mg treatment given to rats with ionized hypomagnesemia reduced posttraumatic impairments. No such correlation was found using blood total Mg levels, which did not change postinjury. In other in vivo animal studies Mg treatment has been shown to reduce posttraumatic edema and cortical damage, in association with concomitant changes in gene expression for c-fos, heat shock protein-70, neurotrophins, and cyclooxygenase-2 [136, 138]. In addition to Mg's multiple effects on intermediary metabolism, oxidative phosphorylation, protein synthesis, regulation of membrane permeability to  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $K^+$  ions, and potential anti-inflammatory effects, it has also been recently shown in murine cortical cell cultures to be a potent antioxidant to iron-dependent oxidative injury [139]. By increasing the physiologically active ionized Mg fraction,  $MgCl_2$  possibly restores the ability of cells to maintain homeostasis [137]. Available data therefore suggest that early measurement of blood ionized Mg levels and supplementa-

tion when indicated may be of value in reducing morbidity after head injury or cerebral infarction. The positive data correlating neuromotor outcomes after head injury and correcting ionized hypomagnesemia are currently limited to animal studies only; more investigation needs to be carried out to determine whether the same holds true in human head-injured patients in prospective randomized controlled trials.

### Treatment of hypomagnesemia

Treatment recommendations for hypomagnesemia in intensive care are confounded by the lack of controlled clinical data regarding the directional changes in time-matched serum total and ionized Mg levels, particularly in relation to concomitant ionized  $Ca^{2+}$ ,  $K^+$ , and  $PO_4$  concentrations. In addition, renal insufficiency, administration of drugs which promote renal Mg wasting, and varying recommendations for Mg repletion are problematic [140, 141]. An ideal ICU study to clarify these issues would therefore have to first attempt to define the measure of true Mg deficiency (total body, extracellular ionized, etc.) that is correlated with clinical manifestations. The study would further need to control for disturbances in other cations and drugs that interfere with Mg balance and renal function and determine the clinical, biochemical, and hemodynamic effects of correcting Mg deficiency with the ultimate goal of determining patient outcomes.

Nonetheless, several generalizations are appropriate regarding the treatment of Mg deficiency:

- Emergency (intravenous route):
  - 8–12 mmol Mg over 1–2 min
  - 40 mmol Mg over next 5 h
- Severely ill (intravenous or intramuscular route)
  - 40 mmol Mg on day 1
  - 16–24 mmol Mg on days 2–5
- Oral maintenance
  - 12–24 mmol per day

Kidney function must be assessed prior to the initiation of Mg therapy. Since the major route of Mg excretion is via the kidney, significant hypermagnesemia can occur in the setting of compromised renal function. In general, when rapid Mg administration is needed, as for cardiac arrhythmias, the intravenous route is safe. It should, however, be performed with hemodynamic and electrocardiographic monitoring as there may be significant prolongation of intra-atrial and atrioventricular nodal conduction times [142] as well as hypotension. Davies et al. [143] noted hypotension in three patients during

Gram-negative bacteremic sepsis when Mg sulfate ( $MgSO_4$ ) was given using a rapid regimen (8 mmol intravenously over 5 min). The authors did not mention the degree of hypotension that occurred, nor the baseline blood pressure and the use of vasopressors (if any) prior to Mg administration. No hypotension occurred when 48 mmol  $MgSO_4$  was infused over 24 h. Such hypotensive responses may reflect the combined effects of sepsis-induced myocardial dysfunction together with Mg infusion-induced reductions in systemic vascular resistance. In the critical care setting treatment recommendations must therefore be tempered with the urgency of replacing Mg deficits. Slower infusions (mentioned below) are appropriate unless cardiac arrhythmias or seizures are present. Slow replacement can be achieved by giving 8–12 g  $MgSO_4$  intravenously over 24 h, followed by 4–6 g daily for another 3–4 days [40]. Since up to 50% of administered Mg may be lost in the urine, continuous infusions of Mg or repeated doses may be preferable. However, there are no controlled data with regard to the efficacy of this approach in critically ill patients. Oral Mg salts can be used as maintenance therapy in conditions associated with chronic Mg loss, for example, short or long-term use of diuretics. An initial daily dose of 300–600 mg elemental Mg may be used. The Mg is given in divided doses to decrease its cathartic effect. Significant hypermagnesemia can complicate Mg replacement when the glomerular filtration rate is less than 30 ml/min [13]. Elevation in serum total Mg to levels higher than 2 mmol/l are usually accompanied by symptoms. The effects of increasing rise in serum total Mg levels include hypotension (1.5–2.5 mmol/l), electrocardiographic changes (2.5–5 mmol/l), areflexia (5 mmol/l), respiratory paralysis (7.5 mmol/l), and cardiac arrest (>12.5 mmol/l) [38]. Physiological antagonism of hypermagnesemia with intravenous calcium gluconate can be used until dialysis can be initiated.

With respect to cardiac arrhythmias and ventricular arrhythmias in particular, recommended protocols for Mg treatment are unclear as no large-scale controlled studies comparing replacement regimens, their effects

on total vs. ionized Mg levels, and clearcut physiological endpoints have been performed. In general, 2 g  $MgSO_4$  constituting 8 mmol intravenously over 1–2 min, followed by an additional 40 mmol over the next 5 h is considered safe and probably effective [141]. As discussed above, an antiarrhythmic dose of 0.15 mmol/kg  $MgSO_4$  given as an intravenous bolus over 10 min was used by Kasaoka et al. [128] to correct ionized hypomagnesemia (<0.40 mmol/l). Simultaneous administration of  $K^+$  and  $Ca$  may be necessary because concomitant losses of these cations are common in Mg deficiency. Emerging data underscore the lack of a predictable relationship between serum total and ionized Mg levels, either before or after intravenous Mg supplementation. Barrera et al. [144] were unable to predict serum  $Mg^{2+}$  levels from serum total Mg values in 33 ICU patients, in whom intravenous treatment with 4.1 mmol (1 g) had no effect on ionized  $Ca^{2+}$  or  $K^+$  concentrations, although both serum ionized and total Mg levels were increased.

## Summary

Mg metabolism and the important physiological roles of Mg as they relate to the critically ill have been reviewed. However, fundamental aspects of Mg metabolism, assessment of Mg deficiency, and efficacy of treatment of hypomagnesemia, whether total or ionized, remain poorly understood. Although serum total Mg continues to be the most frequently used tool for diagnosing and treating hypomagnesemia, randomized clinical studies are needed to determine whether newer methods of Mg assessment, including the measurement of  $Mg^{2+}$ , are superior. Newer insights into the immunomodulatory roles of Mg in vivo, improvements in estimating whole-body and compartmental Mg concentrations, and clearer documentation of the biochemical and physiological effects of correcting hypomagnesemia will undoubtedly assist the intensivist in determining the rationale and the mode for correcting a low Mg value.

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## Pulmonary endothelium in acute lung injury: from basic science to the critically ill

**Abstract** *Background:* Pulmonary endothelium is an active organ possessing numerous physiological, immunological, and metabolic functions. These functions may be altered early in acute lung injury (ALI) and further contribute to the development of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Pulmonary endothelium is strategically located to filter the entire blood before it enters the systemic circulation; consequently its integrity is essential for the maintenance of adequate homeostasis in both the pulmonary and systemic circulations. Noxious agents that affect pulmonary endothelium induce alterations in hemodynamics and hemofluidity, promote interactions

with circulating blood cells, and lead to increased vascular permeability and pulmonary edema formation.

*Objective:* We highlight pathogenic mechanisms of pulmonary endothelial injury and their clinical implications in ALI/ARDS patients.

**Keywords** Endothelium · Lungs · Acute lung injury · Acute respiratory distress syndrome

### Introduction

The intimal lining of all blood vessels is composed of a single continuous layer of simple squamous epithelial cells of mesenchymal origin which are called endothelial cells (ECs). In the human lung ECs occupy a surface area of approximately  $130 \text{ m}^2$  [1]. Vascular endothelium was considered for many years to be nothing more than a nucleated layer, functioning as a semipermeable barrier that separates blood from the surrounding tissues and, in the lungs, blood from air. However, extensive research over the past 25 years has confirmed that vascular endothelium is a highly specialized metabolically active organ possessing numerous physiological, immunological, and synthetic functions (Table 1). The strategic location of the lungs and the tremendous surface area of the pulmonary capillary endothelium allow the latter to filter

the entire circulating blood volume before it enters the systemic circulation. Thus pulmonary endothelial functional and structural integrity are essential for adequate pulmonary and systemic cardiovascular homeostasis.

Pulmonary endothelium is a major component of the alveolar-capillary unit; it is therefore vulnerable to injury from noxious agents (mechanical, chemical, or cellular) that are either inhaled or delivered to the lung through the pulmonary circulation and may cause acute lung injury (ALI) in animals and humans (Table 2).

ALI represents a pathological continuum characterized by acute respiratory distress and severe oxygenation impairment, occurring as a consequence of the host response after exposure to noxious external or endogenous agents. The most severe extreme of ALI is the acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), an overt noncardiogenic pulmonary edema that carries high morbidity and mortality

**Table 1** Major pulmonary endothelial functions

Synthesis and release of several vasoactive compounds such as angiotensin II, prostacyclin, thromboxane A <sub>2</sub> , nitric oxide (NO), and endothelins; regulation of vascular tone
Expression of enzymes such as angiotensin converting enzyme, endothelin converting enzyme, nucleotidases, NO synthase and lipoprotein lipase
Expression of receptors and signal transduction molecules
Cell surface redox activity (transplasma membrane electron transport systems)
Removal and biotransformation of drugs
Regulation of coagulation and thrombolysis; promotion of hemofluidity
Participation in immune reactions
Binding of immune complexes
Interaction with bacteria (phagocytosis) and blood components such as leukocytes and platelets
Expression of adhesion molecules
Production of growth factors
Production of cytokines and chemokines
Production of reactive oxygen species
Barrier function

**Table 2** Major agents that cause pulmonary endothelial injury

Endotoxin
Cytokines, chemokines
Activated leukocytes
Proteolytic enzymes
Partially reduced O <sub>2</sub> species
Immune complexes
Microbes (e.g., rickettsial infection)
Hyperoxia
Radiation
Drugs
Ischemia/reperfusion
Hyperlipidemia
Fibrin split products
Actin and actin complexes
Toxins
Mechanical stretch

[2]. ALI/ARDS is caused by an autodestructive inflammatory process characterized by the activation of intra-pulmonary and circulating cells and by a tremendous influx of neutrophils (although ARDS occurs in neutropenia) and cytokine production, resulting in a breakdown of the lung barrier and gas exchange functions. ALI pathogenesis is still only partly understood; however, pulmonary endothelium plays a major role by: (a) altering its metabolic activity, thus affecting pulmonary and systemic homeostasis; (b) mediating cell-cell adhesions, especially with neutrophils; and (c) changing its barrier permeability, thus promoting pulmonary edema formation [3].

### Pulmonary endothelial functions

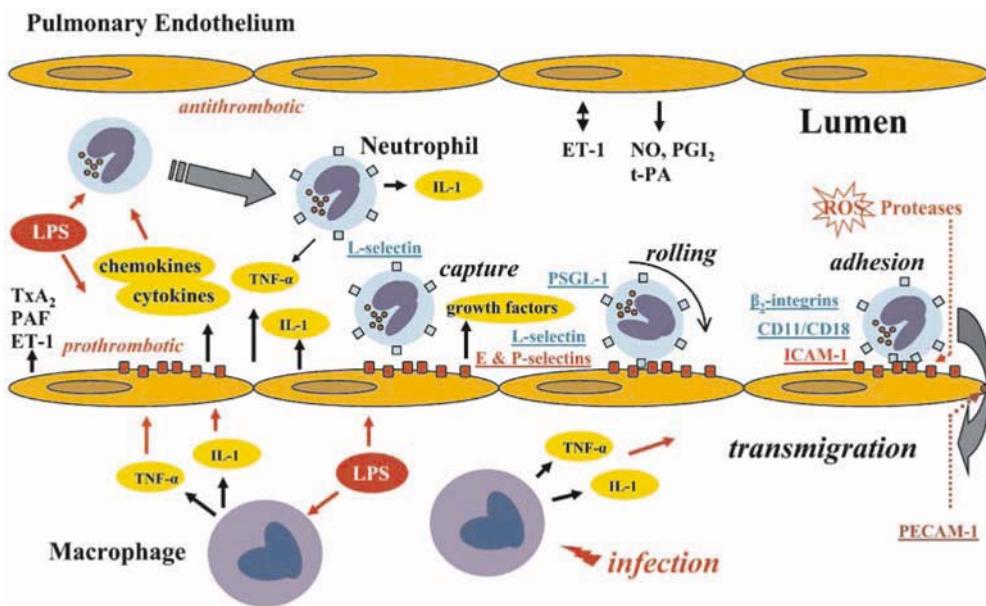
The various pulmonary endothelial metabolic properties were identified using isolated perfused lung preparations,

in vivo animal studies, and EC culture techniques. It is well recognized now that the pulmonary endothelium possesses numerous enzymes, receptors, and transduction molecules, and that it interacts with other vessel wall constituents and circulating blood cells. Major physiological properties of the pulmonary endothelium include: (a) the promotion of antiaggregation and hemofluidity, (b) an enforced barrier function, and (c) the synthesis, metabolism, or uptake of vasoactive compounds that modulate the systemic (endocrinelike action) and/or pulmonary vascular tone (paracrinelike action) [4, 5]. The latter appears to contribute in the induction of hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction (HPV), a unique physiological feature of the pulmonary circulation that maintains proper ventilation/perfusion match and optimizes systemic oxygenation. Although the exact role of EC in HPV is still under investigation, EC-derived vasoactive compounds such as nitric oxide, endothelin (ET) 1, and a yet unidentified agent that may cause Ca<sup>2+</sup> sensitization in the smooth muscle have been implicated [6]. Consequently, pulmonary endothelial injury is expected to compromise adequate HPV and contribute to the ventilation/perfusion abnormalities seen in ALI/ARDS.

The most important endothelial functions are presented in Table 1. Most of these functions are constitutive while others are induced upon endothelial activation after exposure to proinflammatory stimuli such as endotoxin and/or cytokines. In this respect the activated pulmonary endothelium (a) expresses leukocyte adhesion molecules, (b) produces cytokines, (c) induces changes in vascular integrity and tone, (d) becomes procoagulant, and (e) upregulates HLA molecules [7]. ALI is associated with an intense pulmonary inflammatory response with accumulation of both pro- and anti-inflammatory mediators [8]. If the proinflammatory process dominates, endothelial activation is followed by functional and, at a second stage, structural endothelial injury, leading to alterations in all the above critical metabolic functions that contribute to ARDS pathogenesis. ARDS-related structural endothelial injury has been identified in humans: Postmortem studies of patients who died of sepsis-related ARDS revealed patchy EC swelling and injury [9], while a recent study found circulating ECs to be increased (i.e., increased EC shedding) in sepsis and septic shock, suggesting a widespread endothelial damage that should also include the pulmonary endothelium [10].

### Cytokines and pulmonary endothelium

Cytokines are soluble polypeptides serving as chemical messengers between cells; they are involved in processes such as cell growth and differentiation, tissue repair and remodeling, and regulation of the immune response [11]. ECs are both targets and cytokine producers. Among the more than 250 known cytokines, tumor necrosis factor



**Fig. 1** Schematic illustration demonstrating major endothelial functional properties in the normal lung (upper endothelial cell layer), and mechanisms of pulmonary endothelial injury induced by infection, encompassing many of the major inflammatory interactions among cytokines, macrophages, neutrophils, and pulmonary endothelium. LPS Lipopolysaccharide; TNF- $\alpha$  tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$ ; IL-1 interleukin-1; NO nitric oxide; ET-1 endothelin-1; PGI<sub>2</sub>

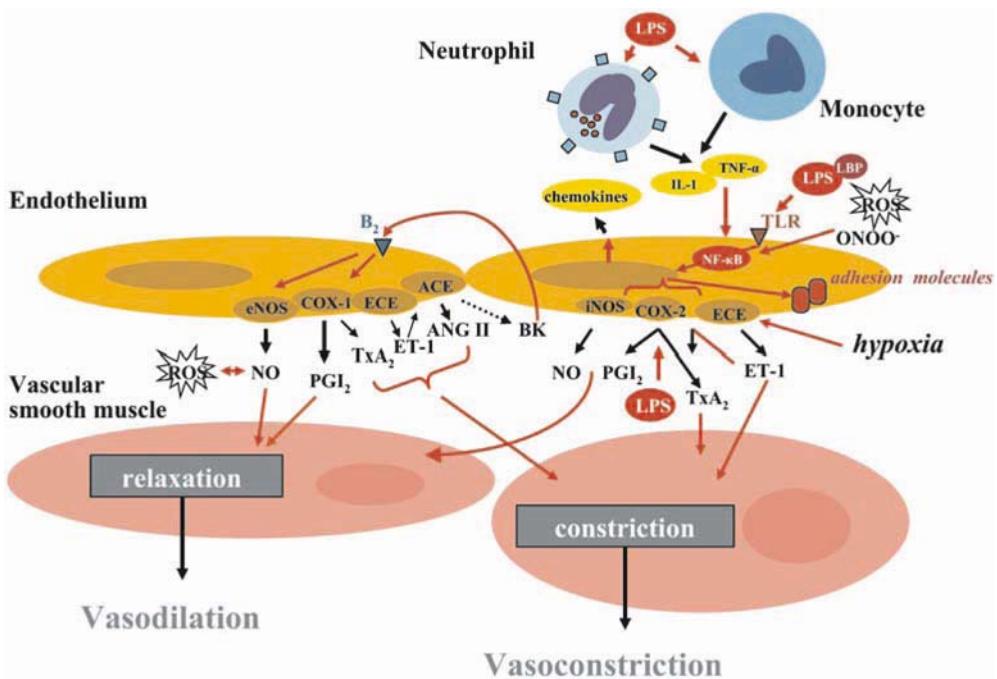
prostacyclin;  $TxA_2$  thromboxane A<sub>2</sub>;  $PAF$  platelet-activating factor;  $t-PA$  tissue plasminogen activator;  $ROS$  reactive oxygen species;  $PSGL-1$  P-selectin glycoprotein-1;  $ICAM-1$  intercellular adhesion molecule-1;  $PECAM-1$  platelet-endothelial cell adhesion molecule-1. Underlined Adhesion molecules; red arrows action; black arrows synthesis (and uptake for ET-1); dotted arrows location

(TNF)  $\alpha$  and interleukin (IL) 1 are produced mostly by mononuclear phagocytes, and natural killer cells. In the lung they are mainly produced by activated interstitial and alveolar cells (primarily macrophages), as well as ECs, and have a major role in the early ALI stage. TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-1 share a number of biological properties and markedly amplify each other's biological actions. They act on EC mainly by inducing a functional program that promotes thrombosis and inflammation [12]. Among other things they induce (a) a prothrombotic EC phenotype, (b) the production of several cytokines including chemokines, colony-stimulating factors, IL-6 which has both pro- and anti-inflammatory properties, and IL-1 itself, (c) the production of several autacoids such as prostanooids including prostacyclin ( $PGI_2$ ) and thromboxane A<sub>2</sub>, platelet-activating factor (PAF) and nitric oxide (NO), and (d) the upregulation of adhesion molecules (Fig. 1). All these functions, with the latter being the most important, contribute to ALI/ARDS development [11, 12].

Several animal studies have revealed the pro- or anti-inflammatory contribution of cytokine-EC interaction in the pathogenesis of ALI occurring from different insults. In this respect acid aspiration induced lung injury in rabbits is mediated mainly by neutrophils recruited in the lung by IL-8 and the subsequent endothelial injury [13], while IL-8 also mediates injury from smoke inhalation to both pulmonary endothelium and epithelium in the same animal model [14]. In contrast to this, cardiotrophin-1, a

member of the gp130 cytokine family that carries anti-inflammatory properties, appears to attenuate the endotoxin-induced impairment of endothelium-dependent pulmonary vasorelaxation in an ALI ex vivo rat model [15]. Partial liquid ventilation with perflubron decreases serum TNF- $\alpha$  concentrations in a rat acid aspiration model, thus reducing the systemic sequelae of ALI [16]. The above anti-inflammatory phenomenon might be related in part to attenuated leukocyte activation, which would consequently attenuate leukocyte-EC interaction. Interestingly, it has recently been shown that TNF- $\alpha$  installation into the alveolar space sends inflammatory signals to the adjoining capillary endothelium, which in minutes upregulates the expression of the adhesion molecule P-selectin enhancing leukocyte-EC interaction [17].

The cytokine-EC interaction in ALI pathogenesis has also been shown in humans or human tissues. Pulmonary microvascular EC (PMEC) from ARDS patients present an upregulation of TNF-R2 receptors and a higher constitutive production of IL-6 and IL-8 than control PMEC, suggesting either a stronger EC activation occurring during the ALI/ARDS process or that PMEC are constitutively more reactive in subjects who subsequently develop ARDS [18]. Additionally, TNF- $\alpha$  induces IL-8 production by pulmonary EC via the p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase pathway; the underlying mechanism is regulated by the EC redox status, suggesting that anti-oxidant therapy might be of value in the ALI treatment [19].



**Fig. 2** Schematic illustration of major endothelial–smooth muscle interactions under normal conditions and after endothelial exposure to inflammatory stimuli. Inflammatory stimuli induce vasoactive mediator synthesis via the activation of nuclear factor- $\kappa$ B ( $NF-\kappa B$ ) or other transcription factors. Lipopolysaccharide (LPS) activates signaling pathways, leading to  $NF-\kappa B$  through binding to Toll-like receptors (TLR) on the endothelial surface. TLR responsiveness depends on LPS-binding protein (LBP) and other factors.  $TNF-\alpha$ ;  $IL-1$  interleukin-1;  $NO$  nitric oxide;

$ONOO^-$  peroxynitrite;  $ET-1$  endothelin-1;  $PGI_2$  prostacyclin;  $TxA_2$  thromboxane A<sub>2</sub>;  $ANG\ II$  angiotensin II;  $BK$  bradykinin;  $ROS$  reactive oxygen species;  $eNOS$  endothelial NO synthase;  $iNOS$  inducible NO synthase;  $COX-1$  constitutive cyclooxygenase;  $COX-2$  inducible cyclooxygenase;  $ACE$  angiotensin-converting enzyme;  $ECE$  endothelin-converting enzyme;  $B_2$   $B_2$  kinin receptor. Red arrows Action; black arrows synthesis (and uptake for  $ET-1$ ); dotted arrow breakdown

A particular pro-inflammatory process of high clinical importance is the ventilator-induced lung injury (VILI). This highly morbid clinical entity is believed to be caused by excessive mechanical stress that alters epithelial and endothelial barrier properties and stimulates pro-inflammatory responses of several cell types including macrophages and neutrophils [20]. Conventional mechanical ventilation in ARDS patients can induce ventilator-associated lung injury (VALI) that leads to pro-inflammatory cytokine production, attenuated by a protective ventilatory strategy [21]. In this respect “protective” low tidal volumes appear to attenuate epithelial and endothelial injury [estimated by plasma von Willebrand factor (vWF) and permeability to albumin] in a rat model of acid-induced ALI, demonstrating the role of endothelial injury in this pathology [22].

#### Transcriptional mechanisms in ALI

Transcription factors (i.e., DNA-binding proteins that regulate gene expression) are major components of the molecular mechanism underlying the cytokine-induced EC activation. Among these, nuclear factor- $\kappa$ B ( $NF-\kappa B$ )

is a crucial factor for the maximal expression of many cytokines involved in ALI pathogenesis.  $NF-\kappa B$  enhances the transcription of several genes including cytokines, growth factors, vasoactive mediators, adhesion molecules, immunoreceptors, and acute-phase proteins (Fig. 2) [23].  $NF-\kappa B$  regulates the cytokine-mediated inducibility of adhesion molecules and cytokines in EC [24].  $NF-\kappa B$  activation is the final target of a signal transduction pathway that leads from the cell surface to the nucleus. Numerous inducers have been implicated in  $NF-\kappa B$  stimulation including proinflammatory cytokines (mainly  $TNF-\alpha$  and  $IL-1$ ), bacterial and viral products [such as lipopolysaccharide (LPS)], and reactive oxygen species (ROS) [23].

ROS at low (subcytotoxic) concentrations function as important signaling molecules, while at higher concentrations they induce cell injury and death (see below) [25].  $NF-\kappa B$  activation is a major redox-sensitive transcription factor: Thiol antioxidants such as *N*-acetylcysteine abolish LPS-induced activation of  $NF-\kappa B$  and improve lung function in ARDS patients [23]. Similarly, high intracellular glutathione concentrations inhibit  $NF-\kappa B$  activation, an inhibition also induced by high levels of glutathione disulfide, the oxidized form of glutathione [25]. Redox

regulation of NF- $\kappa$ B appears to be complex and mediated by both oxidant and antioxidant mechanisms; it is cell-type specific and in several cases is more facilitatory than causal [23, 25]. Cathecholamines that are often administered in ALI/ARDS subjects also affect NF- $\kappa$ B activation via several mechanisms, including ROS generation [26].

Activation of NF- $\kappa$ B is a critical step in the initiation of neutrophilic inflammation in animals and has been linked to ALI/ARDS pathogenesis. NF- $\kappa$ B activation is inhibited *in vivo* by treatment with antioxidants, corticosteroids, and the induction of endotoxin tolerance [24]. In a similar respect NF- $\kappa$ B dependent expression of EC adhesion molecules were downregulated by antioxidant treatment [23]. Dexamethasone administration in isolated rat lungs inhibited the TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-1 induced upregulation of pulmonary vascular ET, possibly via NF- $\kappa$ B dependent mechanisms [27]. These findings suggest that a specific NF- $\kappa$ B inhibition would contribute to ALI/ARDS treatment.

### **Reactive oxygen and nitrogen species**

Patients with ARDS are subjected to an oxidant burden that results in molecular/cellular damage and arises from an increased generation of ROS and reactive nitrogen species (RNS) and/or a deficiency of antioxidant defenses. ROS include superoxide anion ( $O_2^-$ ), hydrogen peroxide ( $H_2O_2$ ) and hydroxyl radical (OH). Various ROS sources such as the mitochondrial respiratory chain, the protease-mediated enzyme xanthine oxidase, the metabolic cascade of arachidonic acid, and the oxidative burst of activated neutrophils are present in ARDS [28]. RNS consist of species such as NO, nitrogen dioxide ( $NO_2$ ), and peroxynitrite ( $ONOO^-$ ). NO is highly reactive with free radicals; the reaction between NO and  $O_2^-$  produces the very powerful and cell toxic  $ONOO^-$  [28].

Following the exposure to various inflammatory stimuli, pulmonary endothelial, epithelial, and alveolar macrophages are among the lung cell types that contribute to the production of ROS and RNS, with deleterious effects on pulmonary endothelium [29]. Among other features, oxidant stress alters endothelial barrier function and increases endothelial permeability through activations of protein kinase C, myosin light chain kinase and other signaling pathways [25, 29]. ARDS nonsurvivors reveal higher levels of oxidative stress and damage than survivors as well as histochemical evidence of RNS-modified proteins in the lungs, while the antioxidant protective system in ARDS is severely compromised [28, 29].

### **Leukocytes and pulmonary endothelium**

Pulmonary endothelial-leukocyte interaction is a key step in ALI/ARDS development since alterations in cell-cell

adhesion is the initial step in leukocyte migration from the capillaries into the lung parenchyma, and the subsequent inflammatory response. Neutrophils appear to be the key cell type related to pulmonary injury in ALI/ARDS, while eosinophils [30, 31] and macrophages have also been implicated [30, 31, 32]. The latter might be responsible for ALI occurring in neutropenic patients [32].

Neutrophil adhesion to EC is a multistage process and a sine qua non for successful neutrophil migration and extravasation (Fig. 1). The initial phase, neutrophil capture and rolling, is mediated by cell adhesion molecules of the selectin family: L-selectin is constitutively expressed on neutrophils, P-selectin is found on platelets and EC, while E-selectin is expressed solely on EC [32, 33]. P-selectin is expressed within minutes on EC surface after EC activation by stimuli such as histamine, thrombin, bradykinin, leukotriene C<sub>4</sub> or free radicals; P-selectin interacts with neutrophil counterreceptors such as the P-selectin glycoprotein-1. E-selectin is rapidly synthesized by EC after cell activation by cytokines such as TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-1, or endotoxin [33].

The second phase is firm neutrophil adhesion (Fig. 1). It requires the interaction of the  $\beta_2$  (CD18) integrin family (more specifically the CD11/CD18 integrins) expressed on neutrophils, mainly with the intercellular adhesion molecule (ICAM) 1, a member of the immunoglobulin superfamily expressed on EC [33]. ICAM-1 expression on EC is augmented by inflammatory mediators such as TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1,  $\gamma$ -interferon, and endotoxin. Although ICAM-1 is constitutively expressed by EC in relatively high levels, it appears that the additional expression induced by cytokines is important for the neutrophil-EC interaction [33]. Oxidant stress promotes neutrophil adhesion [25]. Once neutrophils firmly adhere on the pulmonary endothelial layer, they create a microenvironment for injury, mainly via the production of proteases and ROS (i.e., oxidant burst) that induce cell injury and death. Neutrophil adherence to EC or matrix proteins appears to prime the former for a massive burst lasting 1–3 h in response to stimuli such as TNF- $\alpha$ . Activated EC also generate ROS, contributing in maintaining an oxidant-rich environment at injury site [25].

Neutrophil transmigration through the endothelium is the third phase of the adhesion cascade. It does not necessarily accompany firm adherence and depends on the presence of a chemoattractant gradient and the platelet-EC adhesion molecule 1 (PECAM-1) expressed on EC junctions [33]. ROS appear to increase endothelial permeability, facilitating leukocyte transmigration [25].

A large body of evidence has demonstrated the critical role of the neutrophil interaction with pulmonary endothelium in ALI in animals and humans and has examined potential therapeutic interventions. In this respect the dysfunction of endothelium-dependent and endothelium-independent pulmonary vasorelaxation in an endotoxin-induced ALI rat model is attenuated by

neutrophil depletion [34], while neutralization of CD18 attenuates ALI caused by acid installation in the rabbit [35]. Activated neutrophils, as revealed by elastase and superoxide production, are involved in an oleic acid induced ALI guinea pig model [36], while E-selectin and ICAM-1 play important roles in the bleomycin-induced ALI and the subsequent lung fibrosis, through the induction of neutrophil recruitment in the pulmonary circulation [37, 38]. Pulmonary endothelial P-selectin up-regulation appears to play a crucial role in the leukocyte recruitment occurring in the pulmonary microcirculation in a pancreatitis-induced ALI rat model, a process that is possibly related to free radicals generated by xanthine-oxidase released by the injured pancreas. Constitutive pulmonary endothelial ICAM-1 contributes to the pathogenic process [39].

Numerous human studies have been performed focusing on EC-neutrophil interaction indices in ALI in an effort to both investigate the underlying pathogenic mechanisms and possibly provide endothelial markers that could predict ALI/ARDS development or outcome [3]. In this respect granulocyte aggregation occurring in the pulmonary microcirculation after activation by transfusion-derived antibodies or biologically active lipids appears to be involved in transfusion-related ALI in man [40]. Soluble plasma P-selectin was found elevated in ALI patients, especially in those who subsequently died [41], while plasma vWF antigen, soluble ICAM-1, and soluble E-selectin measured in patients at risk for ARDS were elevated in septic but not in trauma subjects [42].

In a different study, plasma soluble (s)E-selectin measured in ARDS at-risk patients were significantly lower in those who subsequently progressed to ARDS than in those who did not or in normal controls. Significant correlations were found between the above low sE-selectin levels and the requirement for ventilation, the degree of respiratory failure, and patient mortality, elucidating the interactions between neutrophils and ECs at the early ARDS stage [43]. Additionally, PMEC purified from ARDS patients who died revealed a significantly higher constitutive expression of ICAM-1 than in control human PMEC. When treated with TNF- $\alpha$ , both cell lines showed a dose-dependent increase in ICAM-1 expression that was significantly higher in the ARDS-derived EC [18]. The question remains, however, of whether the observed stronger EC activation occurred during the ALI/ARDS process, or, more importantly, whether PMEC are constitutively more reactive in subjects who will subsequently develop the syndrome.

A more recent study used the endothelial specific E-selectin promoter to express a selective  $\beta_2$  CD11/CD18 integrin antagonist in a cell- and inflammation-specific manner. This treatment prevented neutrophil adhesion to human pulmonary artery ECs that had been activated by LPS; it additionally prevented neutrophil sequestration in the lungs and ALI development in mice that had received

*Escherichia coli* intraperitoneally. These data suggest that conditionally blocking of  $\beta_2$  integrin function at sites where the endothelium is activated is feasible and might offer in the future a means of locally preventing neutrophil activation that leads to ALI/ARDS [44].

### Pulmonary endothelium and pulmonary vascular permeability

Increased pulmonary vascular permeability is a hallmark of ALI/ARDS pathogenesis since it is a sine qua non for noncardiogenic pulmonary edema formation. ARDS patients exhibit persistent pulmonary endothelial permeability that was revealed in vivo by means of a dual-isotope technique; the severity of vascular permeability appeared related to lung injury score as proposed by Murray et al. [45] and the number of neutrophils in bronchoalveolar lavage [46].

Increased pulmonary endothelial permeability may be induced by ALI-related cytokines, other agents, and via EC cytoskeletal-related mechanisms in response to stimuli such as thrombin or mechanical stretch. For a detailed analysis the reader is referred to [47]. Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) is a potent vascular permeability inducer. VEGF was higher in the plasma of ARDS patients, especially in subsequent nonsurvivors as compared to that from patients at risk of ARDS or controls; VEGF may be another important factor in the pathogenesis of noncardiogenic pulmonary edema in ARDS [48].

### Pulmonary endothelium and hemofluidity

ECs possess a sophisticated metabolic machinery of interactive factors that modulates all three components of the hemostatic system: platelet aggregation, blood coagulation, and fibrinolysis [49]. In the healthy lung the combined effect of these factors promotes hemofluidity, while under pathological conditions the injured pulmonary endothelium becomes thrombogenic.

#### Platelets and pulmonary endothelium

Pulmonary endothelium affects platelet function mainly through the production of the platelet aggregation inhibitors PGI<sub>2</sub> and NO; the production of vWF; the conversion of adenosine diphosphate (which can induce platelet aggregation) to adenosine monophosphate, mediated by the endothelial ectoenzyme adenosine di-phosphatase; and the removal of serotonin from the pulmonary circulation [49]. In ALI all the above features may be altered leading to enhanced platelet aggregation. In this respect several agents that could cause ALI, such as oxidative injury generated from reactive oxygen spe-

cies and hyperoxia, alter the synthesis and release of PGI<sub>2</sub> [49], while the pulmonary endothelium-mediated extraction of serotonin is decreased in ARDS patients [50].

Numerous studies have shown that vWF is altered in ALI/ARDS, and that vWF is a sensitive marker denoting the existence of EC injury or activation [3]. vWF is synthesized predominantly by vascular ECs. Markedly elevated levels of plasma vWF were reported in patients with acute respiratory failure 22 years ago [51]; this phenomenon appears to occur in early ALI, prior to significant endothelial damage [52]. Since then investigators have focused on the validity of vWF as a predictor of ARDS development. Elevated plasma vWF in patients with nonpulmonary sepsis had a predictive value for ALI development, especially in patients who had concomitant dysfunction of at least one organ [53]. However, more recent studies confirmed that vWF is increased in ARDS at risk patients, but it does not predict ALI development in a heterogeneous patient population [54, 55].

#### Pulmonary endothelium and coagulation

Pulmonary endothelium possesses both anticoagulant and procoagulant properties. Antithrombin III (AT III) is a major inhibitor of blood coagulation that inhibits thrombin. EC possess heparinlike glycosaminoglycans and sulfated proteoglycans on their surface that sequester AT III and thrombin from the circulation, facilitating their reaction [49]. Additionally, AT III binding to glycosaminoglycans promotes PGI<sub>2</sub> release [56], a feature that among other things prevents LPS-induced pulmonary vascular injury in rats, possibly by inhibiting lung leukocyte accumulation [57].

Thrombomodulin (TM) is an anticoagulant proteoglycan located on the EC surface. TM reacts with thrombin producing a marked increase in the thrombin-catalyzed activation of protein C, which in turn inactivates coagulation factors VA and VIIA [49]. Plasma TM is increased in ARDS patients, possibly through proteolytic release from the injured pulmonary endothelium, an event mediated by activated neutrophils [58]. Similarly, plasma TM is increased in preterm infants with respiratory distress syndrome, especially in those treated with mechanical ventilation [59]. The critical role of TM dysfunction on ALI/ARDS development was recently demonstrated by blocking pulmonary endothelial TM in mice by means of glucose oxidase (the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> generating enzyme) immunotargeting. This treatment caused lung injury that combined oxidative, prothrombotic, and inflammatory components, characteristic of the ALI/ARDS pathology in humans [60].

Endothelial procoagulant properties under normal conditions are covered by its predominant anticoagulant activity. In this respect the activity of thromboplastin, an EC-associated procoagulant factor, is normally low but

can be induced by various ALI-related stimuli such as endotoxin, IL-1, and thrombin [49].

#### Pulmonary endothelium and fibrinolysis

Pulmonary endothelium is actively involved in the fibrinolytic process, expressing tissue-type (t-PA) and urokinase-type (u-PA) plasminogen activators as well as plasminogen activator inhibitors [49]. The EC fibrinolytic activity appears to be affected by several ALI-related mediators including endotoxin, IL-1, TNF- $\alpha$ , and thrombin [49, 61]. In a more recent study human PMECs isolated from ARDS patients expressed higher procoagulant activity and plasminogen activator inhibitor (PAI) 1 as well as lower fibrinolytic potential (i.e., t-PA/PAI-1) than the controls, confirming the procoagulant pulmonary endothelial profile in ARDS [61].

### Pulmonary endothelium-derived vasoactive mediators

#### Nitric oxide

NO is a free radical (RNS) with a very short half-life and is very unstable in biological systems. NO is formed from L-arginine by NO synthase (NOS). There are three known NOS isoforms: (a) neuronal (n) NOS, also expressed in pulmonary arterial smooth muscle cells (SMC), (b) inducible (i) NOS, induced by several pro-inflammatory mediators, which upon expression produces NO at very high rates with profound effects on cardiovascular homeostasis, and (c) endothelial (e) NOS, a constitutive isoenzyme expressed principally in EC (Fig. 2) [62]. The latter is the main isoenzyme involved in vascular tone regulation. Deficiency of L-arginine or the NOS cofactor tetrahydrobiopterin may result in eNOS-generated O<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> instead of or along with NO, promoting the formation of highly reactive RNS such as ONOO<sup>-</sup>. NO activates soluble guanylate cyclase, thus producing 3,5-cyclic monophosphate (cGMP) and eliciting cGMP-mediated SMC relaxation and other cell-specific functions [62].

In addition to vascular SMC relaxation, NO inhibits (a) platelet aggregation, (b) leukocyte adhesion, and (c) cellular proliferation [7]. In the pulmonary circulation NO synthesis is reduced under hypoxia, and as such it may modulate HPV [63], a feature that is lost in ARDS. Several studies have reported that NO can in addition exert either pro- or anti-oxidative effects, depending on the type and the quantity of oxygen radicals present; NO can additionally attenuate ARDS-associated lung leak [64]. Therapeutic NO inhalation improves oxygenation in several ALI animal models and in responder ARDS patients, while in addition it inhibits neutrophil activation, platelet adhesion, and the production of inflammatory mediators in the injured lungs [64].

## Endothelins

Endothelins (ETs) are the most potent naturally occurring vasoconstrictors. Three isoforms have been identified, ET-1, ET-2, and ET-3 all formed from “big endothelin” by ET-converting enzyme [7]. ET-1 is produced mainly by EC, and its production is induced by several factors including hypoxia, endotoxin, TNF- $\alpha$ , interferon, and epinephrine (Fig. 2) [7]. ET-1 release occurs mainly in the abluminal direction towards SMC, and its signaling is mediated by two distinct receptors, ET<sub>A</sub> and ET<sub>B</sub>. ET<sub>A</sub> is expressed on SMC, signaling vasoconstriction; ET<sub>B</sub> is expressed primarily on EC and elicits transient vasodilation by signaling NO and prostaglandin release, revealing a cross-talk between the ET-1 and NO pathways [62]. Similarly, EC activation is characterized by a reciprocal ET-1 and eNOS regulation, with most pro-inflammatory stimuli increasing ET-1 and decreasing eNOS expression [62].

The human lung is an important site for both ET-1 clearance and production: approximately 50% of circulating ET-1 is cleared in a single transpulmonary passage via the ET<sub>B</sub> receptor, with a simultaneous equal production [65]. This balance between pulmonary ET-1 clearance and release was found decreased early in ALI, reversing in patients who subsequently recovered [66]. Additionally, plasma ET-1 values are increased in septic patients with and without ARDS [67], possibly contributing to the ALI-associated pulmonary hypertension.

## Prostaglandins

Among the several cyclo-oxygenase (COX) products PGI<sub>2</sub> and thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> are probably the most important in ALI. PGI<sub>2</sub> is a potent vasodilator and an important inhibitor of platelet aggregation. Thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> is a potent pulmonary vasoconstrictor secondary to endotoxin infusion; Thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> also increases capillary permeability and platelet aggregation [7]. Prostaglandin E<sub>1</sub> (PGE<sub>1</sub>) is another COX product with EC protective properties. As with PGI<sub>2</sub>, PGE<sub>1</sub> is a vasodilator and platelet aggregation inhibitor, also impairing neutrophil chemotaxis and macrophage activation [68]. COX products contribute to HPV; however, their vasoactive action varies with the size of the artery and the species involved. A particular role of eicosanoids in several ALI models is their contribution to the regulation of perfusion redistribution that diverts blood flow to healthier lung regions. Pretreatment of rabbits with indomethacin, under partial lung microvascular recruitment, protects against PMA-induced pulmonary endothelial enzyme dysfunction, probably by diverting flow to previously unperfused (i.e., unexposed to PMA) capillaries. Under nearly full microvascular recruitment, the above protective effect of indomethacin is abolished [69]. In a similar respect selective

inhibition of the inducible COX isoform protects against the endotoxin-related loss of perfusion redistribution in an oleic acid induced dog ALI model, an effect mediated by PGI<sub>2</sub> [70].

## Platelet activating factor

Pulmonary ECs release the phospholipid PAF, a highly reactive mediator that has been reported to cause both vasodilation and vasoconstriction *in vivo*, depending on its concentration [49]. PAF has been additionally reported to increase lung permeability, to activate platelets, neutrophils, and macrophages and to cause EC release of t-PA and PGI<sub>2</sub>. PAF synthesis by EC may be induced by H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and other reactive oxygen species [49]. *E. coli* injection in rats induced pulmonary hypertension stimulated by PAF and partly mediated by ET-1; it additionally induced PAF-mediated microvascular injury and leak as well as neutrophil activation-sequestration in the lungs. Pretreatment with a PAF receptor antagonist completely blocked all the above events, suggesting a potential future therapeutic application for this compound [71].

## Pulmonary endothelial angiotensin-converting enzyme

Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) hydrolyzes angiotensin I to angiotensin II and breaks down bradykinin [72, 73]. Pulmonary endothelium-bound (PE) ACE has a central role in maintaining adequate local and systemic homeostasis, revealing the dynamic interaction between EC and other cell types schematically shown in Fig. 2. In this respect angiotensin II induces SMC constriction, proliferation, and growth. In contrast to this, bradykinin that escapes ACE inactivation exerts vasodilatory, anti-inflammatory and antithrombotic actions through stimulation of endothelial B<sub>2</sub> kinin receptors, causing the synthesis and release of substances such as NO and PGI<sub>2</sub>, generated by eNOS and constitutive COX (COX-1), respectively [73]. PE-ACE pro-inflammatory action is further revealed by the fact that angiotensin II can generate O<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> via the activation of NADH/NADPH oxidases in EC and SMC [73]. Superoxide anions interact with NO to generate ONOO<sup>-</sup>, while free radicals from several sources cause molecular and cellular damage and decrease ACE activity [74]. It has recently been proposed that the PE-ACE activity reduction seen in ALI is related to enzyme downregulation, mediated by overproduction of ONOO<sup>-</sup> and other ROS/RNS, aimed at reducing oxidant stress in the microenvironment [74]. The role of PE-ACE in lung injury and repair may be more complex since recent investigation provided evidence that ACE possesses characteristics of a signal transduction molecule, involved in EC outside-in signaling [75].

Pulmonary endothelial ACE is an ectoenzyme uniformly distributed throughout the luminal EC surface, with its catalytic site exposed to the blood stream; it is directly accessible to blood-borne substrates, and its activity may be measured *in vivo* by means of indicator-dilution type techniques [5, 72, 76]. Due to the very high enzyme concentrations in the capillaries, monitoring pulmonary endothelial ACE activity in this type of studies, is in practical terms equal to monitoring pulmonary capillary endothelium-bound (PCEB) ACE activity [72]. This method offers quantifiable indices that may distinguish between abnormalities secondary to endothelial dysfunction *per se* and decreased pulmonary vascular surface area. PCEB-ACE activity estimations have been recently validated in humans [77].

Plasma soluble ACE (sACE) activity is decreased in ARDS patients [78]. However, in contrast to PCEB-ACE, sACE activity is a surrogate index of pulmonary endothelial function. PCEB-ACE activity reduction is among the earliest signs in various ALI animal models, preceding changes in parameters such as acid-base balance, gas exchange, hemodynamic parameters, increased permeability, and morphological changes at the light and electron-microscopic level. This is the case following administration of bleomycin to rabbits [79], exposure of rabbits to hyperoxia [80], PMA administration to rabbits and dogs [69, 81], and chest irradiation to rabbits [82, 83]. Similarly, pulmonary endothelial ACE activity depression, determined by the decreased pulmonary uptake of an anti-ACE monoclonal antibody, occurs in rats secondary to normoxic lung ischemia/reperfusion [84].

PCEB-ACE activity was estimated in mechanically ventilated patients belonging to high-risk groups for ARDS development and suffering from various degrees of ALI/ARDS [85]. Enzyme activity was expressed as transpulmonary substrate hydrolysis (reflecting enzyme activity per capillary) and as the functional capillary surface area (FCSA) index  $A_{max}/K_m$  (reflecting enzyme activity per vascular bed) related to both enzyme quantity and functional integrity [72, 77]. Both indices decreased early during the ALI/ARDS continuum and were inversely related to the lung injury score [45], suggesting that the clinical severity of the syndrome is related to the degree of PCEB-ACE activity depression (*i.e.*, the underlying pulmonary endothelial dysfunction). Further analysis of the FCSA data revealed two different profiles in the  $A_{max}/K_m$  vs. cardiac output relationships, probably distinguishing patients with reserves of healthy or mildly injured capillaries from those without; the former had better survival, raising the possibility that FCSA could be of value as an outcome predictor in ARDS [85].

Marshall et al. [86] have recently shown that ACE insertion/deletion polymorphism is associated with the susceptibility and outcome in ARDS, with the DD genotype frequency being increased and associated with mortality in these patients. This first description of a

specific allele association with ARDS development suggests a major role for the renin-angiotensin system in the pathophysiology of the syndrome. Although the D allele has been associated with higher ACE activity, this does not necessarily contradict the reported PCEB-ACE activity reduction in ALI/ARDS [85]. The former could affect mostly other lung compartments or, alternatively, the latter might be related to either damaged ECs or to PCEB-ACE downregulation as a host response aimed at reducing local inflammation.

### **Endothelium-related therapies in ALI/ARDS**

Pulmonary endothelial functional and structural alterations are key components of ALI pathogenesis. Consequently EC-related therapies may have beneficial effects in ALI/ARDS. Such therapies should restore adequate endocrine and paracrine EC functions, and protect ECs against harmful insults as well as against pro-inflammatory cell-cell interactions [68, 87]. Several therapeutic interventions, most of them related to endothelium-derived vasoactive (and anti-inflammatory) mediators are already in place, in an effort to improve arterial oxygenation and treat ARDS-related pulmonary hypertension [68]. In this respect inhaled or intravenous PGI<sub>2</sub>, inhaled or intravenous (in either native or liposomal form) PGE<sub>1</sub>, and, mainly, inhaled NO have been used, with mixed results [68, 87]. Additional agents include antioxidants such as *N*-acetylcysteine and hyperoncotic albumin, and the thromboxane synthetase inhibitor ketoconazole [87]. Several agents already in clinical use for treating pathologies other than ALI, such as ET-1 receptor antagonists, phosphodiesterase inhibitors, and ACE inhibitors might have beneficial effects. For a comprehensive analysis of this topic the reader is referred to [68] and [87]. Throughout this review several experimental studies with future therapeutic potential have been reported. More recent experimental work focus on unmasking EC diversity in an effort to develop means that will target the injured pulmonary endothelium and allow specific drug and/or gene delivery.

### **Conclusion and future directions**

In addition to gas exchange, pulmonary vasculature filters the entire circulating blood before the latter enters the systemic circulation, affecting both local and systemic vascular tones, inflammatory processes, and whole-body homeostasis. Pulmonary circulation possesses two major distinct features: in health it responds to hypoxia with HPV to maintain adequate ventilation/perfusion match; in critical illness pulmonary hypertension may develop, as opposed to the often occurring systemic hypotension. As these responses strongly depend on pulmonary endothelial functional and structural integrity, further under-

standing of the pulmonary endothelial properties will provide insights into ALI pathophysiology and how the latter affects systemic cardiovascular homeostasis. In this respect recent investigations revealed the existence of pulmonary EC heterogeneity that might contribute to ALI pathogenesis: neutrophil adhesion through ICAM-1 induces cytoskeletal changes in pulmonary microvascular ECs (where the site of neutrophil emigration) and not in pulmonary arterial ECs [88]. Additionally,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  communication from pulmonary septal capillaries appears to establish a pro-inflammatory state in downstream venular capillaries, probably amplifying lung inflammation [89]. Specific pulmonary ECs that locally enhance or amplify lung injury might be the targets of future genetic or other therapies.

A National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute workshop has recently proposed future research directions in ALI/ARDS [90]. Pulmonary ECs appear to be the first lung cells altered in ALI/ARDS generated by sepsis, trauma,

and other systemic conditions. Among other things, EC heterogeneity should be further investigated along with the EC functional changes involving new gene expression or constitutive pathways, the molecular mechanisms that govern pulmonary EC responses, their interaction with alveolar epithelium, and the responses of systemic endothelium in ALI/ARDS. New EC-related therapies targeting pulmonary microvascular inflammation and thrombosis, and the value of newly implanted pulmonary ECs derived by intravenous infusion of bone marrow stem cells should be investigated [90]. In relation to the former, studies of activated protein C administration in ARDS patients are already under way.

In conclusion, pulmonary EC dysfunction is a key component of ALI pathogenesis. Future investigations of pulmonary endothelial dysfunction may provide additional information on ALI pathophysiology, markers that could predict ARDS development or outcome, and new therapeutic approaches.

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## Pulmonary and cardiac sequelae of subarachnoid haemorrhage: time for active management?

**Abstract** Cardiac injury and pulmonary oedema occurring after acute neurological injury have been recognised for more than a century. Catecholamines, released in massive quantities due to hypothalamic stress from subarachnoid haemorrhage (SAH), result in specific myocardial lesions and hydrostatic pressure injury to the pulmonary capillaries causing neurogenic pulmonary oedema (NPO). The acute, reversible cardiac injury ranges from hypokinesis with a normal cardiac index, to low output cardiac failure. Some patients exhibit both catastrophic cardiac failure and NPO, while others exhibit signs of either one or other, or have subclinical evidence of the same. Hypoxia and hypotension are two of the most important insults which influence outcome after acute brain injury. However, despite this, little attention has hitherto been devoted to prevention and reversal of these potentially catastrophic medical complications which occur in patients with SAH. It is not clear which patients with SAH will develop important cardiac and respiratory complications. An active approach to investigation and organ support could provide a window of opportunity to intervene before significant hypoxia and hypotension develop, potentially reducing adverse consequences for the long-term neurological status of the patient. Indeed, there is an argument for all SAH patients to have echocardiography and continuous monitoring of res-

piratory rate, pulse oximetry, blood pressure and electrocardiogram. In the event of cardio-respiratory compromise developing i.e. cardiogenic shock and/or NPO, full investigation, attentive monitoring and appropriate intervention are required immediately to optimise cardiorespiratory function and allow subsequent definitive management of the SAH.

**Keywords** Subarachnoid haemorrhage · Neurogenic pulmonary oedema · Cardiac injury · Critical care Electrocardiogram

**Abbreviations** *ALI* acute lung injury · *CI* cardiac index · *CK-MB* creatine phosphokinase-myocardial fraction · *CVP* central venous pressure · *ECHO* echocardiogram · *ARDS* acute respiratory distress syndrome · *CPP* cerebral perfusion pressure · *EVLW* extravascular lung water · *HDU* high dependency unit · *ICP* intracranial pressure · *ICU* intensive care unit · *MAP* mean arterial pressure · *MPAP* mean pulmonary artery pressure · *Neuro obs* neurological observation/assessment · *NPO* neurogenic pulmonary oedema · *ODM* oesophageal Doppler monitor · *PAC* pulmonary artery catheter · *PAOP* pulmonary artery occlusion pressure · *PAP* pulmonary artery pressure · *PEEP* positive end expiratory pressure · *SAH* subarachnoid haemorrhage · *SBP* systolic blood pressure · *WFNS* World Federation of Neurosurgeons grading for SAH

## Introduction

Subarachnoid haemorrhage (SAH), which affects predominantly women of working age, has devastating consequences with a mortality exceeding 40% and a morbidity so high that less than 25% make a complete recovery [1]. Improved management over recent years has included optimal timing of surgery [2], endovascular coiling [3] and nimodipine therapy [4, 5, 6]. Recently published recommendations support active intensive care for patients with complications of SAH [7], yet research and clinical resources have focused on other major causes of mortality following SAH – direct pressure effects, rebleed and vasospasm, each of which accounts for a quarter of the deaths. However, in a recent study involving more than 450 SAH patients, medical complications accounted for a similar proportion of deaths [8]. Clearly, there is room for improvement.

Medical complications after SAH have been neglected both in terms of research and their importance to outcome in clinical practice. This review will focus on cardiorespiratory compromise – cardiac dysfunction and pulmonary oedema – associated with acute SAH, where the experience of intensivists may have a crucial influence. Evidence will be assessed to clarify the pathophysiological processes that result in life-threatening clinical deterioration. Treatment options will be reviewed and a evidence-based practical approach to patient management will be discussed.

## Medical complications of SAH

The most comprehensive study of medical complications after SAH to date followed 457 adult patients for 3 months after ictus [8]. Patients were recruited between 1987 and 1989, none received a calcium antagonist but corticosteroids were given to 70%, anticonvulsant therapy to 80%, and nearly two-thirds had surgery within 3 days. Complying with current recommendations [7] and practice [9] for ‘triple H’ therapy, 80% had Hypervolaemia (average daily fluid intake during the first 2 weeks was 4.1 l) and over 30% had induced Hypertension. In terms of Haemodilution, the third ‘H’, 30% had ‘anaemia’. Medical complications accounted for 23% of deaths. Other deaths were caused by the primary bleed (19%), rebleed (22%) and vasospasm (23%). While little can be done for the primary bleed, much effort has been directed towards reducing the impact of re-bleed and vasospasm, but relatively little has been aimed at identifying the causes, reducing the incidence or improving the management of medical complications. Indeed, not only is a significant proportion of mortality directly attributable to medical complications, but also a significant degree of morbidity as 83% of those who died had a life-threatening medical complication compared to 30% of survivors [8].

The scope of medical complications in these SAH patients was representative of many intensive care patient groups and included renal, hepatic, haematological, metabolic and endocrine dysfunction. However, the most frequent were pulmonary and cardiovascular complications [8]. Cardiac dysfunction is a well-known and frequently reported complication of SAH, most often recognised on the electrocardiogram (ECG) by arrhythmias, including ventricular fibrillation and conduction abnormalities. Cardiac failure is less commonly reported in the literature, but was found in 4% of patients reported by Solenski et.al. This has also been the subject of several studies of cardiac function after SAH [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. Pulmonary oedema, sometimes severe enough to be life-threatening, was identified in a quarter of patients. As will be discussed later, pulmonary oedema associated with SAH has a different aetiology from the inflammatory response that produces acute lung injury (ALI) and the acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), although SAH can also trigger a systemic inflammatory response leading to this lung pathology.

Cardiac dysfunction and pulmonary oedema may occur together or independently after SAH. Secondary brain injury caused by hypoxia and hypotension – the two most influential factors on poor outcome after acute traumatic brain injury [16] – are situations where intensive care clinicians have arguably the greatest experience and therefore potentially have the most to offer patients. Logical treatment of cardiac and respiratory deterioration requires an understanding of the underlying pathophysiology.

## Cardiac injury

### Electrical cardiac disturbances

Rhythm and conduction disturbances are almost universal after SAH [17] and have been regularly reported in the last 50 years [18]. Anything from fatal ventricular fibrillation to bradycardia is possible [20]; common findings include QRS, ST segment and T-wave abnormalities, and prolongation of the QT interval [21, 22, 23]. These changes may mimic myocardial infarction or ischaemia on a 12-lead ECG [21], but clinical diagnoses of myocardial infarction have been refuted at post-mortem examination due to lack of coronary artery disease [22, 23, 24]. In survivors of SAH the ECG changes are usually reversible, although they may persist for several weeks [11, 22, 25] and can recur in patients with re-bleed. Experimental evidence may explain these ECG abnormalities. Stimulation of the posterior hypothalamus in cats caused a marked pressor response, multifocal ectopic beats, T wave inversion and S-T segment changes [27]. Hypothalamic stress (from ischaemia and/or pressure) is the common link between SAH and its cardiac sequelae.

### Clinical relevance of ECG abnormalities

SAH is almost universally associated with cardiac electrical disturbance [17], but its clinical relevance is questionable. There is no consistent association between ECG abnormalities and the mechanical hypokinesis found on echocardiography, histological cardiac lesions or serum markers of cardiac injury [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17]. In relation to brain secondary insults, a low cardiac output with reduced cerebral perfusion could be important to outcome; markers of impending clinical deterioration would thus be helpful.

Arrhythmias make a significant contribution to mortality and most occur within the first week [20, 28]. In monitored patients, rhythm disturbances occurred in 35%, most commonly sinus tachy or bradycardia, and were considered a moderate threat to life. In addition, ventricular arrhythmias such as asystole and fibrillation were recorded [8], with 5% suffering a life-threatening arrhythmia. These ECG abnormalities were not associated with cardiac failure. Arrhythmias causing haemodynamic changes have been detected in more than 40% of patients, and were life-threatening in 10% [8, 20, 29]. ECGs repeated regularly during hospital admission of 37 SAH patients did not reveal any association between abnormalities and outcome [23]. There were conflicting opinions when neurological state was compared with arrhythmias, some finding no association [12, 20, 29] while others concluded the opposite. However, in a recent study of 61 SAH patients with continuous ECG monitoring, poor outcome was associated with tachyarrhythmias and/or cardiac ischaemia, although this did not hold true for individual ECG abnormalities such as T wave changes [17]. Continuous ECG monitoring in an area with immediate cardiac resuscitation facilities could save lives. In terms of neurological outcome, patients with the most to benefit are those with good neurological grades who may suffer a life-threatening arrhythmia.

Virtually every possible static ECG abnormality has been described after SAH, but clinical relevance is uncertain. Electrolyte disturbance of sodium, calcium and potassium do not seem to be relevant to morphology [12, 22, 30], although, not surprisingly, serious arrhythmias occurred in SAH patients with low serum potassium [29]. Increased urinary catecholamine metabolite and plasma cortisol concentrations were significantly associated with tachycardia, large P waves, short PR interval (<0.13 s), peaked or inverted T waves, and prolonged QTc interval [30]. However, this was refuted in a more recent study [25]. Perhaps ECG abnormalities known to be associated with serious arrhythmias, such as an increased QTc interval, should be measured and thus encourage clinicians to increase their vigilance.

Prolongation of the QT interval after SAH is well documented [10, 11, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 30]. A more recent measure, QT dispersion (the difference be-

tween the longest and shortest QT interval on a standard 12-lead ECG) – which is associated with fatal arrhythmic potential [31] – is increased in SAH patients [32, 33]. The exact mechanism for these changes is unclear, but may be related to imbalance of autonomic tone [22, 25], catecholamines [30, 34, 35] or electrolyte disturbance.

Whatever the truth is in relation to ECG changes, clinical course and outcome, the practical relevance may be a delay in surgery to clip or coil aneurysms as a consequence of additional investigations deemed necessary because of such ECG abnormalities. It could be argued that the standard 12-lead ECG should be discounted in relation to risk assessment for anaesthesia for SAH.

### Ventricular dysfunction

Mechanical pump failure causing a reduction in cardiac output occurs less frequently than conduction problems, but can be fatal. The aetiology is controversial. Myocardial ‘stunning’ is a term that has been applied to sudden and sometimes unexpected ventricular hypokinesis. Sudden onset of ventricular failure (often hypotensive) with or without pulmonary oedema has been reported in SAH case series [8, 11, 36, 37, 38]. In fact, any acute intracranial pathology may result in a stunned myocardium [39]; endogenous catecholamines are the most likely cause.

Surrogate markers for impaired myocardial function include a reduction in blood pressure and cardiac output, or an increase in pulmonary artery occlusion pressure. Direct evidence of ventricular systolic dysfunction can be obtained using echocardiography or nucleotide ventriculography. There are few studies in the literature because these are relatively new investigative tools, but animal experiments provide some insight. SAH induced in nine dogs resulted in motion abnormalities in each, particularly hypokinesis of the left ventricle, detected by transoesophageal echocardiography [34]. SAH causes similar ventricular dysfunction in patients. Case studies after SAH demonstrate general hypokinesia [11, 40, 41] and reduced ejection fraction [37, 41]. Of 19 SAH patients who had thallium scintigraphy, 6 had areas of reversible reduced uptake, indicating perfusion abnormality [10]. Of 12 patients with SAH, more than half had abnormal ventriculography and echocardiography [13]. In a larger series of 45 patients, 4 had ventricular hypokinesis [12], as did 4 of 13 SAH patients in another report [14]. A case series of five SAH patients, all with severe neurogenic pulmonary oedema (NPO), demonstrated low ejection fractions requiring inotropic support. Such cases illustrate that NPO and myocardial wall motion abnormalities can occur concurrently [11], i.e. left ventricular failure, but one does not necessarily follow the other [14]. Wall-motion abnormalities are temporary and normal cardiac function usually returns [10, 11, 13, 14, 41]. In-

terestingly, ventricular dysfunction and ECG changes can occur independently or together [14], but large vessel coronary artery disease has been excluded by angiography as a contributing factor in wall-motion abnormality [13]. This is supported by autopsy [42]; transmural myocardial infarction typically caused by coronary atherosclerosis was not seen at post-mortem in SAH victims; instead discrete focal lesions occurred [10, 12, 13, 43].

### Markers of myocardial cell injury

The myocardium is injured in many patients with SAH; an abnormal increase in plasma creatine phosphokinase-myocardial fraction (CK-MB) concentration is a common finding. The CK-MB was increased in all patients after SAH, but more so in those with echocardiographic evidence of wall-motion abnormalities [14]. More recently, a case series of five SAH patients suffering acute hypotension and NPO was reported [11]. All patients had significantly increased serum CK-MB and wall-motion abnormalities on echocardiography. This pattern has also been described in case reports [40], but there is no association between the increase in CK-MB after SAH and ECG changes [44]. However, there may be an association between cerebral vasospasm after SAH and increased CK-MB [37, 45]. Another marker of cardiac injury, troponin I, was increased in approximately one-fifth of SAH patients, but only a fraction of these had clinically detectable cardiac abnormalities [46]. The reasons for myocardial injury are not clear, but are probably related to hypothalamic stimulation and catecholamine secretion. In animal experiments, stimulation of the midbrain caused myocyte degeneration throughout the heart [27], but most dense in the subendocardium, and surrounded by normal tissue, as is found in SAH patients [47]. Hypothalamic stimulation in cats resulted in cardiac dysfunction and ECG changes similar to those found after SAH. After several hours of stimulation, the hearts had evidence of small haemorrhages and infarcted myocardial fibres with homogeneous cytoplasm, loss of cross striation and loss of nuclei.

### Haemodynamic changes

After SAH clinical manifestations of cardiac injury and NPO may occur simultaneously [11, 24, 37, 38, 40, 48, 49] or in isolation [10, 12, 13, 14, 38, 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56], depending on the individual's response to the pathophysiological insult [42]. A recent retrospective case series included 16 SAH patients with NPO [48]. All were mechanically ventilated and 4 received vasoactive agents (3 epinephrine and 1 dobutamine) prior to baseline haemodynamic recordings. Their initial mean deriv-

atives included a mean arterial pressure (MAP) of 84 mmHg (range 74–104), mean pulmonary artery pressure (MPAP) 29 mmHg (14–44), CVP 10 mmHg (1–29), PAOP 16 mmHg (5–29), cardiac index (CI) 2.5 l·min<sup>-1</sup>·m<sup>-2</sup> (1.6–4.5) and a PaO<sub>2</sub>:FiO<sub>2</sub> ratio (kPa) of 22 (13–34). The clinical picture was thus one of normal blood pressure, reduced cardiac output and pulmonary oedema diagnosed by chest X-ray findings and hypoxaemia (PaO<sub>2</sub>:FiO<sub>2</sub> <40), but with a wide range of PAOP. Most patients had a very low left ventricular stroke work index indicating LVF, but markedly elevated pulmonary vascular resistance implying a pulmonary component in addition to the cardiac aetiology of the NPO. Thus there was a marked variation amongst patients, measured and derived variables being heterogeneous in relation to cardiac and pulmonary lesions.

As the above report shows, NPO occurs in the presence of reduced, normal or increased haemodynamic measures, including PAOP, which ranged from 5 to 29 mmHg at pulmonary artery catheter insertion. It should be noted that insertion of pulmonary catheters in that intensive care unit was not routine, but required the patient to be unstable, for example with hypoxaemia, frank pulmonary oedema or hypotension; five patients had had prior therapy with ephedrine, methoxamine or dobutamine. Another case series of five SAH patients with severe NPO demonstrated a variable cardiac index (1.9–3.0 l·min<sup>-1</sup>·m<sup>-2</sup>), increased PAOP (17–36 mmHg) and reduced ejection fraction (20–35%) on echocardiography with global impairment of the left ventricle [41]. Examining extravascular lung water (EVLW), initial recordings in 21 patients with intracerebral haemorrhage and 4 with SAH showed no difference in PAOP between those with the greatest EVLW and those without increased EVLW (7.8 vs 7.9 mmHg) [54]. Another case report of SAH demonstrated pulmonary oedema, after which a low systemic blood pressure (90/60 mmHg) and high PAOP (22 mmHg) developed, indicating cardiac dysfunction [37]. This was confirmed on cardiac echocardiography and radionuclide ventriculography where a hypokinetic septum and basal segments were associated with a low ejection fraction of approximately 35%. These case series describes small numbers of patients; therefore, caution should be applied when interpreting the results. However, they do illustrate the variable clinical picture at any one point in time.

Other papers demonstrate temporal haemodynamic changes. Although these, too, are drawn from case reports, it is important to acknowledge the cardiovascular changes described, which do not conform to a single clinical picture. A patient with NPO had PAOP values that ranged from 0 to 15 mmHg over a 3-day period with a maximum recorded PAP of 50/17 mmHg [53]. The recordings were infrequent (every 4 h or less), so it is possible that more extreme pressures were missed. Similarly, in a series of four SAH patients who developed NPO

[12], initially normal PAOP values increased to above 16 mmHg. Another patient with SAH developed NPO [55] where the initial right ventricular pressure was 40/2 mmHg and PAOP 0–4 mmHg, although he had several episodes of severe systemic hypertension (up to 410/200 mmHg) with corresponding PAP 110/60 mmHg and PAOP 48 mmHg. Each episode lasted for approximately 5 min before returning to baseline. Other reports confirm rapidly changing PAOP and systemic blood pressure after SAH [57]. These cases underline the rapid and volatile change in pressures that may occur and could easily be missed.

The closest approximation to pulmonary capillary pressure is an estimate somewhere between PAP and PAOP [58]. Indeed, in experimental animals the left ventricular end diastolic pressure exceeded PAP when epinephrine was used to induce pulmonary oedema [59]. The pulmonary veins were the first vessels to develop increased pressure [60]. In response to experimentally induced SAH, the systemic pressure increased, followed by pulmonary venous then pulmonary arterial pressure, with little change in CVP [61]. Resistance in pulmonary veins of rats increases as constrictions or valves within the vessels increase their tone immediately after a blow to the head [62]. Thus pressure increases in the pulmonary veins precede those in the pulmonary capillaries and may not be reflected by PAOP, PAP or CVP [61]. In addition, if the left ventricle fails, it may contribute to the increase in pulmonary venous pressure.

### **Neurogenic pulmonary oedema**

Any factor reducing diffusion across the alveolar-capillary barrier, including interstitial and frank alveolar oedema, will increase the likelihood of hypoxaemia. Post-mortem studies of intracranial pathology recorded an incidence of pulmonary oedema of 46 [63] and 52% [64]. A Minnesota study of sudden deaths found that over 90% of patients with intracranial bleeds had pulmonary oedema [65]. Furthermore, NPO can develop within seconds of a neurological insult. In a series of 56 Vietnam casualties (aged 17–37 years) killed from head wounds, it was found that most had oedema, congestion and haemorrhage of the lungs [66]. Indeed, even 17 of 20 soldiers killed almost instantaneously had these findings at autopsy. Interestingly, casualties with cervical cord transection or massive haemorrhage had normal lungs. The development of NPO requires an adequate systemic circulating volume. Rabbits given epinephrine infusions to induce pulmonary oedema [67] had increased lung-to-body weight ratios and reduced static compliance, but animals rendered hypovolaemic by bleeding prior to epinephrine administration had no evidence of oedema. Similarly, autopsy findings in soldiers with serious head trauma showed no evidence of pulmo-

nary oedema if significant hypovolaemia had occurred [66].

NPO, defined as bilateral pulmonary infiltrates on chest X-ray and reduced  $\text{PaO}_2$  not attributable to another cause, was identified in 23% of all SAH patients surviving to reach hospital and was considered to be a threat to life in 6% [8]. This is probably an underestimate because to meet the definitions of severe (life-threatening) pulmonary oedema for the purposes of the study, a pulmonary artery catheter was required to confirm a  $\text{PAOP} > 22 \text{ mmHg}$  associated with severe impairment of gas exchange ( $\text{PaO}_2 < 6.7 \text{ kPa}$  with  $\text{FiO}_2 \geq 0.4$ ). Pulmonary oedema occurred on days 0–14 but most frequently on day 3, and was associated with increasing age (>30 years), poorer grades (WFNS grading [68]) and day of surgery, but not with 'triple H' therapy, cerebral angiography, past history of cardiac disease, ECG changes or lung disease. The time scale noted also coincides with catecholamine hypersecretion that may last for 10 days or more after SAH [69]. Curiously, hepatic dysfunction was associated with pulmonary oedema [8], perhaps owing to hypoxia or to liver congestion, which has been noted at autopsy [47]. NPO is a serious and common complication after SAH that threatens both survival and good neurological outcome.

### Pulmonary oedema fluid

Several investigations into the nature of SAH-induced pulmonary oedema fluid have been conducted to determine if its evolution is hydrostatic (low protein content) or permeable (high protein content) in nature. The ratio of oedema fluid to plasma colloid oncotic pressure separates transudates from exudates. In a study examining pulmonary oedema fluid from multiple causes, left ventricular failure oedema fluid usually had a ratio of <0.6 [49, 70], i.e. a low protein content and therefore hydrostatic in origin. However, in SAH-induced pulmonary oedema, a spectrum of ratios occur. One of the earliest case reports to document this found a high protein content [53], while more recently a study in 12 SAH patients found an increased ratio (>0.7, permeability lesion) in 5 patients and a low ratio (<0.6) in 7 [38]. SAH-induced NPO with a range of protein concentrations requires further explanation because the findings by Smith et al. [38] suggest that some patients have permeability oedema and others hydrostatic oedema. However, there may be only one pathological process at work. Pulmonary oedema developing after SAH is caused by increasing capillary pressures that damage the endothelium and, as the pressure increases further, disrupts the basement membrane causing fluid and protein extravasation [58]. This is supported by animal work where intense pulmonary vascular constriction induced using endothelin produced an increase in pulmonary pressure and EVLW causing

oedema [71]. Microscopic changes have been found in animal experiments using rabbits [72]. When transmural pressures exceeded 40 mmHg, the pulmonary capillary endothelium became disrupted. As the transmural pressure increased further, the basement membranes of the capillaries and alveoli and the alveolar endothelium were also injured to the point where red blood cells, protein and fluid escaped into the alveolar lumen. Thus, oedema fluid is initially low in protein (low permeability, hydrostatic) but, as barriers are disrupted with increasing capillary pressure, the oedema fluid becomes proteinaceous (high permeability). The time course for this is very variable. Patient data are limited and have not examined cardiovascular markers such as PAOP, PAP and central venous pressure (CVP), in relation to hydrostatic and permeability oedema.

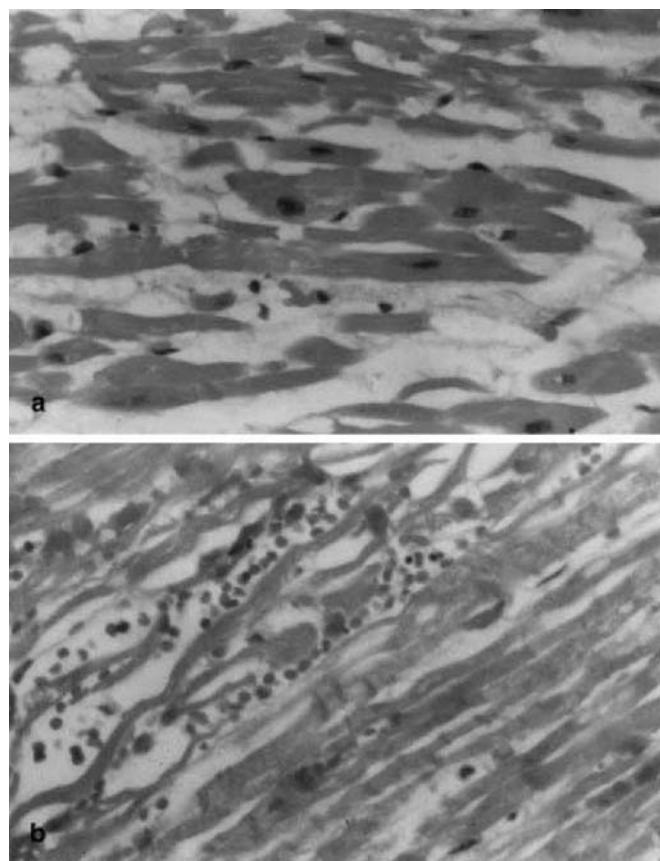
### Catecholamines as the common link

There is a remarkable similarity between the cardiorespiratory compromise found after SAH and that of phaeochromocytoma crises. Sudden onset of ventricular failure (often hypotensive) with or without pulmonary oedema has been reported in case series of SAH [8, 11, 36, 37, 38] and phaeochromocytoma [73, 74]. Pulmonary oedema [75], cardiogenic shock and arrhythmias are common to both, as is the high concentration of catecholamines [25, 30, 32, 35, 47, 69, 76, 77]. Conclusions from many reports on catecholamines in relation to SAH describe a catecholamine 'storm'. In addition, a recent report has found evidence in SAH patients of prolonged and massive sympathetic nervous activation [69]. A three-fold increase in norepinephrine spill-over into the plasma was detected, which was sustained for at least 10 days, but was normal at the 6-month follow-up.

### Catecholamine induced cardiac injury

Experimental evidence linking catecholamines to cardiac injury exists in animals and man. Specific myocardial lesions in animals subjected to infusions of l-norepinephrine [78] are the same as those found in shocked patients treated with epinephrine and l-norepinephrine. In mongrel dogs an increase in plasma catecholamines as a consequence of induced SAH caused specific cardiac lesions on electron microscopy within 4 h of induced SAH [79]. Others have found histological contraction band lesions within 5 min of beginning a catecholamine infusion [80]. Such contraction-band necrosis is unevenly distributed, being most dense at the apex and subendocardial areas of the ventricles [81], i.e. in the regions of heart muscle most responsible for cardiac output.

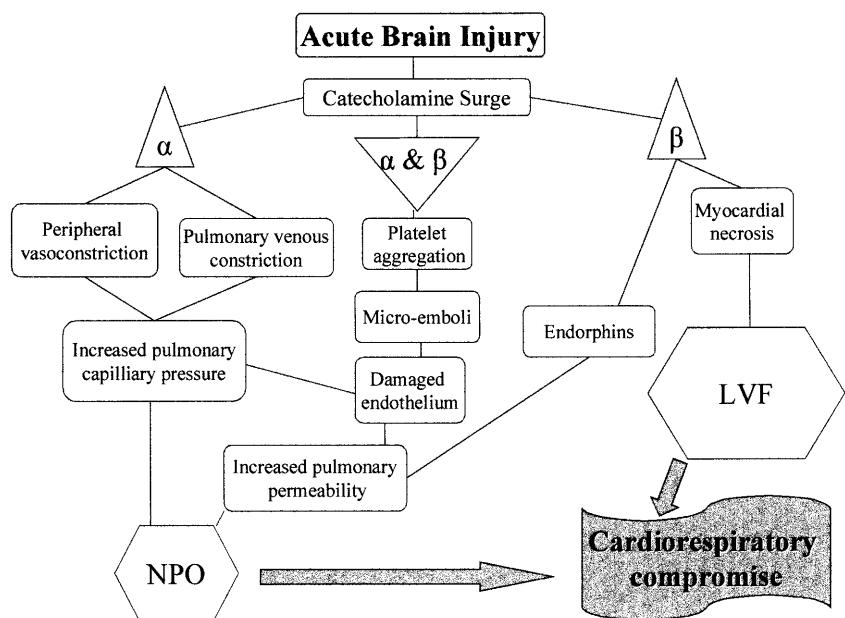
Focal myocytolysis [82] or myofibrillar degeneration [where dense eosinophilic bands replace the normal stri-



**Fig. 1** Histological section (100 $\times$ ) of the myocardium demonstrating **a** normal ventricle and **b** myofibrillar degeneration, myocytolysis and inflammatory cell infiltration

ated appearance of the cytoplasm, and the muscle fibres appear as 'empty' sarcolemic sheaths (Fig. 1)] have been described in patients dying from SAH [47] and phaeochromocytoma [73]. Further human post-mortem evidence of myocytolysis and contraction-band necrosis of the heart in neurosurgical patients, including those dying after SAH, has been described by Connor [50], who considered these lesions to be the same as those caused by catecholamines. Furthermore, in a case series of 54 consecutive SAH deaths [42], 42 cadavers (including a 12-year-old boy) had myocardial lesions described as foci of necrotic muscle fibres, haemorrhage and inflammatory cells that were not found in the control group. An interesting finding was that the SAH victims with more variable pulse and blood pressure recorded prior to death (presumably from autonomic fluctuation) were more likely to have myocardial lesions. In addition, hypertensive heart disease was associated with significantly fewer myocardial lesions than SAH victims without hypertensive heart disease. Perhaps patients with hypertensive heart disease are less sensitive to catecholamines and are thus protected from their acute effects. It is not clear if

**Fig. 2** Subarachnoid haemorrhage can result in sympathetic activation that causes pulmonary oedema and cardiac failure ( $\alpha$  alpha-adrenoceptor,  $\beta$  beta-adrenoceptor, LVF left ventricular pressure)



anti-hypertensive medication such as beta-blockers or some intrinsic property of the hypertensive myocardium to resist a catecholamine 'storm' play a part. In another SAH post-mortem study, those who died suddenly were compared to those with WFNS grade 5 who subsequently died. NPO was much more common in the 68 sudden-death patients; histological examination of the myocardium was performed in 6 patients which showed contraction band necrosis in every case [28]. Multifocal transmural myocardial injury was the post-mortem finding in most SAH patients, but not in the control group [43]. Catecholamine induced myocardial injury poses challenges for prophylaxis and therapy.

#### Catecholamine-induced pulmonary oedema

Catecholamines can cause pulmonary oedema. They increase transmural pulmonary vascular pressures [83] by a combination of  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -adrenoceptor activation, and cardiac injury (Fig. 2). Frank pulmonary oedema can be induced experimentally by epinephrine infusion [59, 61], or seen clinically in phaeochromocytoma crisis [75, 84, 85, 86]. The largest initial effect is increased pulmonary venous pressure [61]. Pulmonary arterial pressure may then increase and this is sometimes reflected in the central venous pressure. A rise in pulmonary capillary pressure was demonstrated in 11 baboons where brain death was induced by acute intracranial hypertension. Between brain injury and death, significant increases in circulating catecholamines occurred, causing an increase in systemic vascular resistance and acute left ventricular fail-

ure. In this study mean PAOP increased above the mean PAP in most animals, and more than 70% of blood volume pooled in the lungs. The high pressures within the pulmonary circulation caused pulmonary oedema and alveolar haemorrhage in 4 of the animals [87].

An increase in EVLW, whether extensive enough to result in frank pulmonary oedema or not, reduces compliance [83]. Using the double-indicator dilution method to calculate EVLW in 25 patients with SAH, Tuoho et.al. [54] found a significant positive correlation between increased alveolar-arterial oxygen difference ( $AaDO_2$ ) and increasing EVLW. An increase in EVLW occurs in animal models of raised ICP and massive sympathetic discharge [88, 89] and was proportional to pressures in the pulmonary circulation. The essential physiological phenomenon was the requirement for a massive, but not necessarily prolonged, rise in PAP [88, 90]. Studies in humans during maximum exercise have shown PAP and PAOP to reach maximal mean values of 37 and 21 mmHg, respectively [91]; capillary pressure should fall between the two pressures at approximately 30 mmHg. Pathological states may exceed such pressures. After SAH the increase in catecholamine concentration can occur in seconds and be 1200, 145 and 35 times the normal limit for epinephrine, norepinephrine and dopamine, respectively [92]. Furthermore, epinephrine can remain increased in the circulation for at least 10 days [69]. This could explain why NPO can be seen anytime from ictus up to 14 days [8, 41, 66].

## Hypothalamic lesions after SAH

Since catecholamines are responsible for myocardial injury and pulmonary oedema, then the question of what induces the catecholamine release is raised. In a post-mortem study, 49 of 54 patients dying from SAH had microscopic hypothalamic lesions consisting of small-ball haemorrhages and infarctions [42]. Of these, 42 also had the typical myocardial lesions described above. However, in the control group of patients with raised ICP caused by other intracranial pathologies (all with swollen brains), there were no hypothalamic or myocardial lesions. Another group reported hypothalamic and cardiac lesions on post-mortem examinations in patients dying suddenly of SAH [93]. In other reports, patients with SAH had hypothalamic, cardiac and pulmonary lesions [24, 47]. Therefore, a raised ICP per se cannot explain the cardiac and pulmonary injuries, although there is clinical and experimental [34] evidence to support an association between these and hypothalamic lesions.

Ischaemia and/or infarction of the posterior hypothalamus is the most likely initiating event that causes sympathetic activation. In a series of 106 patients dying from SAH, 65 had hypothalamic lesions which had histological evidence of ischaemia, microhaemorrhages, massive haemorrhage or a combination of ischaemia and haemorrhage [94]. Perhaps the close proximity of subarachnoid blood from the ruptured aneurysm influences the fine perforating arteries to the hypothalamus, causing microvascular spasm.

## Management

There are two important reasons for being proactive in the treatment of patients with cardiac and/or respiratory complications of SAH. Firstly, secondary brain injury caused by hypoxia and hypotension should be prevented [2]. Secondly, mechanical cardiac dysfunction and NPO are very treatable with potentially good outcomes, despite affected patients appearing moribund [41].

### Identifying patients at risk

It is not clear which SAH patients will develop cardiac and respiratory complications, but risk factors include poor neurological grade, age over 30 years, hypertension, ventricular repolarisation abnormalities, and the timing of surgery [8, 33]. These patients may benefit from early intensive monitoring.

### Prophylaxis

Regardless of where the trigger zone is within the brain, experimental evidence shows that when acute brain inju-

ry occurs, if the cervical cord is transected [47, 61, 66] or if cardiac sympathetic nerves are severed or blocked [95], pulmonary oedema does not develop [27, 93]. Similarly, cardiac lesions do not occur if the cervical cord is transected [27]. Prophylactic pharmacological drugs used to block the effects of the autonomic nervous system, such as  $\alpha$ -blockade with phenoxybenzamine, prevented death and pulmonary oedema in rabbits infused with epinephrine [59]. Pharmacological cardiac sympathectomy prevented myocardial injury in baboons killed by a sudden massive increase in ICP [95]. There may be a role for prophylactic intervention to prevent cardiac and pulmonary complications after SAH. Clearly, cord transection is not a therapeutic or prophylactic clinical option, but pharmacological shielding from the catecholamine storm deserves further evaluation.

There are few data from clinical trials, but prophylactic combined  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -blockade using phentolamine and propranolol may reduce myocardial injury from catecholamines after SAH [93]. In this study 90 SAH patients presenting within 48 h of ictus and without a history of cardiac disease were randomised to receive both propranolol 80 mg 8 hourly and phentolamine 20 mg 3 hourly, or placebo. There was no difference in the mortality (perhaps because of small numbers) but, at autopsy, focal necrosis of the myocardium was only present in the placebo group, implying a protective cardiac effect. Another report by the same group showed benefit in terms of survival and neurological state in SAH patients given prophylactic phentolamine and propranolol [96]. They surmised this was due to a reduction in complications such as NPO and cardiac lesions. An interesting suggestion that deserves further consideration is stellate ganglion block [66]. A more contemporary therapy that may have benefit is infusion of magnesium, which inhibits catecholamine release and may reduce cerebral vaso-spasm [97]. These therapies require caution, however, as a reduction in MAP and CPP could result.

### Impaired cardiac function

It may be difficult to identify patients with ventricular dysfunction, as the ECG is non-specific [10, 11, 12, 17], while isoenzyme markers of myocardial injury take time to become apparent and may be inconclusive [11, 44]. Once pulmonary oedema and/or cardiac compromise is evident, echocardiography to assess LV function would be useful to guide therapy. In addition, invasive monitoring may produce helpful information, despite the risks [98], as almost any combination of normal and abnormal pulmonary pressures is possible [48], and these may change with time [55]. A new alternative is the oesophageal Doppler monitor, which gives objective and subjective information about left ventricular function and the systemic circulation [99, 100], although not the pulmo-

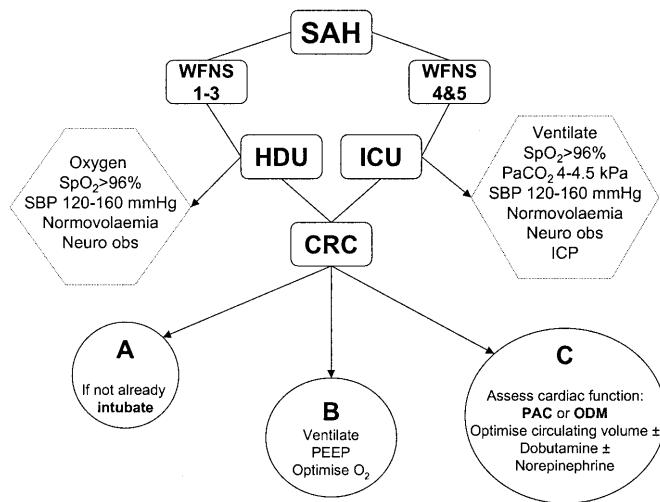
nary circulation. This method is now used in preference to the pulmonary artery catheter in some intensive care units.

Surprisingly, inotropic support may improve matters, despite catecholamines causing ventricular injury and NPO. In patients with reduced left ventricular work, dobutamine has proved effective [37, 41, 56, 96]. A recent series of SAH patients with pulmonary oedema, increased PAOP and variable cardiac index (but all with low ejection fractions on echocardiography) were treated successfully with dobutamine and a combination of epinephrine and/or norepinephrine (although one patient did also receive intra-aortic balloon pump assistance) [41]. This report is not unique. Patients with SAH (or other intracranial pathology) and myocardial impairment treated with dobutamine rapidly normalised their cardiac index, and improved PAOP and ventricular work with consequent benefit to oxygenation [48]. It is difficult to reconcile the fact that endogenous catecholamines cause cardiac and pulmonary complications and that patients may then be treated using similar agents. Perhaps it is the magnitude of the endogenous catecholamine surge that causes the pathology, and thereafter the levels quickly decline, perhaps to the point where catecholamine depletion at the receptor level exists so that low-to-moderate exogenous administration has a beneficial therapeutic effect.

#### Pulmonary oedema

Traditional management strategies for cardiac failure induced pulmonary oedema, such as positive pressure ventilation and diuretics are often used for SAH patients [48, 101]. Systemic circulating volume overload is, however, not the cause of SAH-associated NPO. The pulmonary circulation may be severely over-loaded [87] as a result of catecholamines shunting blood, so that the systemic circulation is rendered acutely hypovolaemic. Therefore, volume resuscitation may be more appropriate than diuretic therapy to restore circulating volume acutely and optimise right ventricular preload [41].

These clinical reports confirm the potential of functional reversibility of cardiac and pulmonary pathophysiology. Cardiac involvement may be overt or subclinical in a substantial number of SAH patients, and a proactive approach to identify them, for example using echocardiography, with a subsequent increase in the level of monitoring and care would seem appropriate for this relatively young patient group. At the very least, patients exhibiting any clinical evidence of NPO and/or cardiac impairment should have a pulmonary artery catheter or oesophageal Doppler assessment of cardiac function to guide therapy. A guide to management is shown in Fig. 3.



**Fig. 3** Management of cardiorespiratory compromise after subarachnoid haemorrhage. Neurogenic pulmonary oedema and cardiac dysfunction can manifest clinically as separate entities or together. They should be considered together as part of a clinical syndrome – ‘CRC’ – which requires assessment of cardiac function for optimal treatment

#### Implications for management of brain-stem dead organ donors

Most cadaver organs for transplant in the UK come from patients dying of intracranial catastrophes, i.e. trauma and haemorrhage. Catecholamine-induced myocardial injury (although reversible with time) and pulmonary endothelial injury, with or without gross pulmonary oedema, is not ideal preparation for these organs. In essence, recipients may not be getting the healthy organs that would be predicted from the donor’s pre-morbid health. Perhaps management aimed at reducing cardiac and respiratory pathology after SAH should be more aggressive when it becomes clear that the neurological prognosis is hopeless. It may even be appropriate under these circumstances to institute therapies that are organ preserving, such as  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -blockade, particularly when cerebral perfusion is no longer a consideration. Some authorities have cautioned against the use of organs from SAH donors because of organ dysfunction, as they do less well than organs from trauma victims [102]. Yet there is such a demand for organs [102] that optimisation of the cadaver until harvest is complete should be a continuing aim [103, 104, 105].

#### Need for clinical trials

There is a compelling argument for well-conducted trials to be undertaken in order to identify patients who will develop cardiac failure, pulmonary oedema or both.

There is an argument for prevention of catecholamine effects using prophylactic  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -blockade, which may reduce the impact of catecholamines on the heart and pulmonary vasculature. However, this needs to be balanced against the need to maintain cerebral perfusion. Once cardiac failure and/or NPO is established, the optimum monitoring and treatment choices need further evaluation. Until a higher priority is given to intensive care aspects for these patients, evidence-based improvements in management cannot happen.

## Conclusions

There is substantial clinical and experimental evidence to support the conclusion that catecholamines cause cardiac failure and pulmonary oedema after an acute neurological event such as SAH. The range of symptoms caused by catecholamines should be considered part of a syndrome of cardiorespiratory compromise, so monitoring and therapy can be rationalised (Fig. 3). The subsequent development of hypoxaemia and hypotension, which adds to the neurological insult and may have long-term physical, cognitive and financial consequences for patients and society, could thus be minimised. The intensivist has a major role to play in pre-empting and treating such complications and must aim to improve management for these patients.

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## Permissive hypercapnia — role in protective lung ventilatory strategies

**Abstract** ‘Permissive hypercapnia’ is an inherent element of accepted protective lung ventilation. However, there are no clinical data evaluating the efficacy of hypercapnia per se, independent of ventilator strategy. In the absence of such data, it is necessary to determine whether the potential exists for an active role for hypercapnia, distinct from the demonstrated benefits of reduced lung stretch. In this review, we consider four key issues. *First*, we consider the evidence that protective lung ventilatory strategies improve survival and we explore current paradigms regarding the mechanisms underlying these effects. *Second*, we examine whether hypercapnic acidosis may have effects that are additive to the effects of protective ventilation. *Third*, we consider whether direct elevation of CO<sub>2</sub>, in the absence of protective ventilation, is beneficial or deleterious. *Fourth*, we address the current evidence regarding the buffering of hypercapnic acidosis in ARDS. These perspectives reveal that

the potential exists for hypercapnia to exert beneficial effects in the clinical context. Direct administration of CO<sub>2</sub> is protective in multiple models of acute lung and systemic injury. Nevertheless, several specific concerns remain regarding the safety of hypercapnia. At present, protective ventilatory strategies that involve hypercapnia are clinically acceptable, provided the clinician is primarily targeting reduced tidal stretch. There are insufficient clinical data to suggest that hypercapnia per se should be independently induced, nor do outcome data exist to support the practice of buffering hypercapnic acidosis. Rapidly advancing basic scientific investigations should better delineate the advantages, disadvantages, and optimal use of hypercapnia in ARDS.

**Keywords** Hypercapnic acidosis · Mechanical ventilation · Acute lung injury · ARDS · Ventilation-induced lung injury · Buffering

### Introduction

‘Permissive hypercapnia’ is an inherent element of accepted protective lung ventilatory strategies. However, the precise role of hypercapnia remains unclear, with no clinical data comparing the efficacy of protective lung ventilatory strategies in the presence and absence of hypercapnia. Furthermore, it is unlikely that such a trial will be carried out, at least in the medium term. In the

absence of such data, it is appropriate to investigate whether the potential exists for an active role for hypercapnia per se, distinct from the demonstrated benefits of reduced lung stretch. This review first considers the evidence that protective lung ventilatory strategies reduce lung injury and improve survival. We examine current paradigms regarding the mechanisms underlying this protective effect, and the passive role presently attributed to hypercapnia. We focus on whether

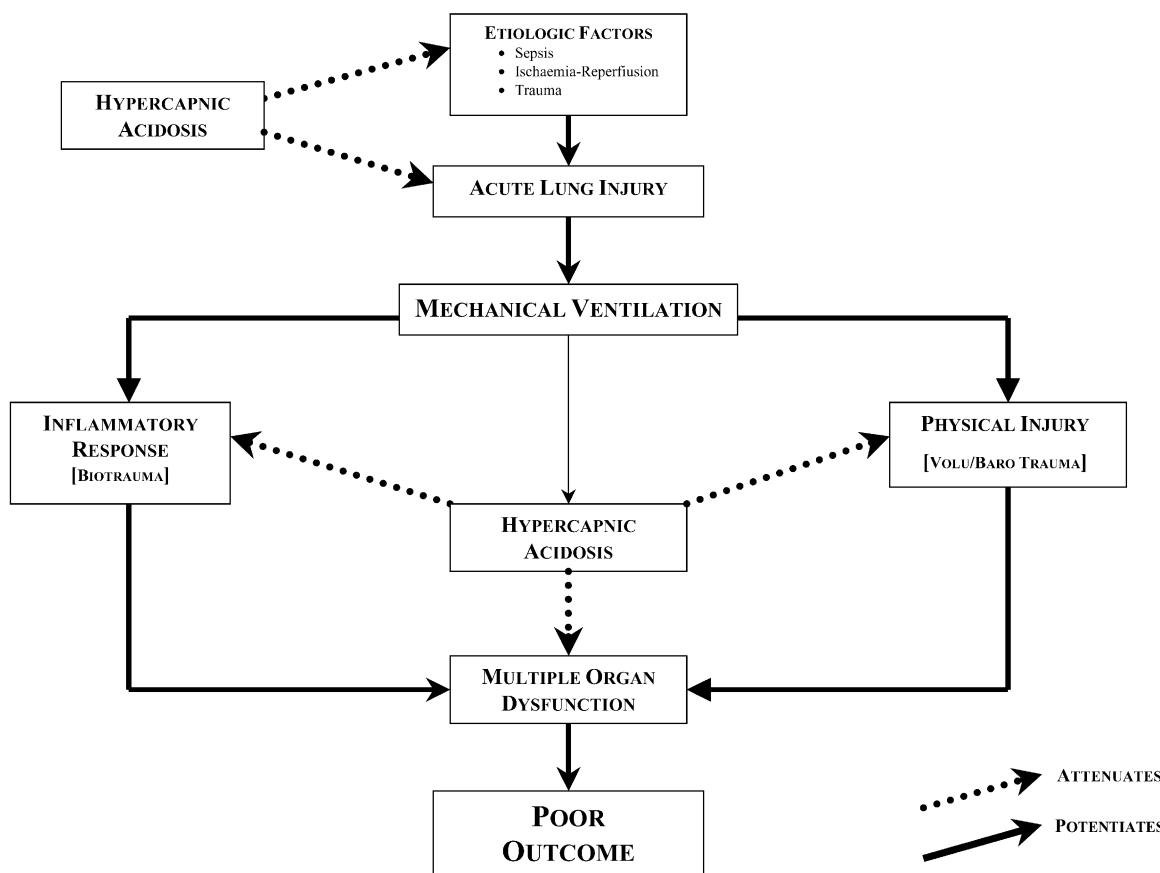
hypercapnia and/or acidosis may have effects that are distinct from the effects of protective ventilator parameters. In addition, the current status of buffering hypercapnic acidosis is reviewed.

### Protective lung ventilatory strategies — current paradigms

It is increasingly clear that mechanical ventilation can potentiate or even cause lung injury and worsen outcome in ARDS patients [1, 2]. The likely mechanisms underlying this ‘ventilator associated lung injury’ (VALI) are increasingly well characterized [3], and several plausible theories have been proposed. Mechanotrauma, which results from repetitive over-stretching and damage of lung tissue and cyclic recruitment-derecruitment of collapsed areas of lung [4–9], plays a pivotal role (Fig. 1). These effects may be particularly important, because increased mechanical stress may directly activate the cellular and

humoral immune response in the lung [8–11], although this is controversial, with conflicting results reported [12]. The potential for intrapulmonary mediators and pathogens to access the systemic circulation is clear from experiments demonstrating translocation of prostaglandins [13], cytokines [14] endotoxin [15], and bacteria [16], across an impaired alveolar-capillary barrier, following high stretch mechanical ventilation. The potential for mechanical ventilation to induce a systemic cytokine response in the clinical context, and for a protective lung ventilation strategy to attenuate this response, has been demonstrated [17]. However, the contribution of cytokine release to the pathogenesis of ventilator induced ALI in the clinical context remains unclear [10, 18].

VALI may be limited by permitting hypoventilation in order to reduce mechanotrauma and the resulting inflammatory effects. This invariably involves a reduction in the tidal volume, and generally leads to an elevation in  $\text{PaCO}_2$ , an approach that has been termed “permissive hypercapnia”. These protective lung ventilation strategies



**Fig. 1** Mechanical ventilation may contribute to ALI by causing direct physical injury (baro- and/or volutrauma) to the lung and by activating the inflammatory response, which in turn may lead to multiple organ dysfunction and adverse outcome. Hypercapnic acidosis may protect the lung and systemic organs via several

mechanisms. These include attenuation of key etiologic factors that lead to ALI, reduction of physical lung damage, inhibition of key aspects of the inflammatory response, and direct protection of systemic organs. Solid arrows indicate potentiation of effect; broken arrows indicate inhibitory effect

improve survival in acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) patients [1, 19, 20]. The reported levels of PaCO<sub>2</sub> and pH (mean maximum PaCO<sub>2</sub> 67 torr, mean pH 7.2) in the study of Hickling et al. [19] reflect typical levels observed with institution of this technique. Accordingly, there has been a shift towards greater clinical acceptability of hypercapnia in acute lung injury (ALI) and ARDS. However, current paradigms attribute the protective effect of these ventilatory strategies solely to reductions in lung stretch, with hypercapnia permitted in order to achieve this goal. Accordingly, the potential for hypercapnia to exert clinically important effects in this context has received little attention to date.

### **Permissive hypercapnia — potential for beneficial effects**

Protective ventilatory strategies that involve hypoventilation result in both limitation of tidal volume and elevation of systemic PCO<sub>2</sub>. Of course, lung stretch is distinct from elevated PCO<sub>2</sub>, and by manipulation of respiratory parameters (frequency, tidal volume, dead-space, inspired CO<sub>2</sub>) can to some extent be separately controlled in humans. The ARDSnet study [2] demonstrated that mechanical ventilation of patients with ARDS with a tidal volume of 6 ml kg<sup>-1</sup> (actually, a complex protocol involving limitation of tidal volume and plateau pressure [21]) resulted in a 25% reduction in mortality when compared with a more traditional tidal volume of 12 ml kg<sup>-1</sup> and a lower frequency. This study minimized the potential for hypercapnia and instead permitted increased respiratory rates (respiratory frequency of 29 min<sup>-1</sup>); as a result PaCO<sub>2</sub> levels were only modestly elevated, and pH modestly decreased, in the low stretch group. In fact, the need to substantially reduce tidal volumes in order to improve outcome in ARDS patients has recently been questioned [22, 23], and it is increasingly clear that most clinicians (*including expert investigators* [24]) seldom use very low tidal volumes in practice. An acceptance of more moderate tidal volumes, whether by analysis [22], or by observation of actual current practice [25, 26] may reduce the need for — and acceptability of — permissive hypercapnia. Therefore, the context in which elevated CO<sub>2</sub> will be encountered in the future is less likely to be as a passive/permissive accompaniment of ‘protective’ ventilation.

These issues underscore the necessity for (and difficulty in) consideration of the effects of hypercapnia in isolation. If hypercapnia was proven to have independent benefit, then deliberately elevating PaCO<sub>2</sub> could provide an additional advantage over reducing lung stretch. Conversely, in patients managed with conventional permissive hypercapnia, adverse effects of elevated PaCO<sub>2</sub> might be concealed by the generally accepted benefits of lessened lung stretch. Because outcome in ICU might be

related to systemic injury — as opposed to simply lung injury — it is necessary to examine the effects of hypercapnia on pathophysiologic function in the heart and brain as well as the lung. These issues are further underlined by the fact that hypercapnia has potentially severe adverse effects in some clinical settings, such as critically elevated intracranial pressure.

Clearly, the presence of an acidosis — whether hypercapnic or metabolic — indicates loss of physiologic homeostasis and the presence of disease and/or organ dysfunction. In fact, the extent and severity of acidosis is predictive of adverse outcome in diverse clinical contexts, including cardiac arrest [27, 28] sepsis [29–31] and in the immediate postpartum neonate [32]. However these data indicate an *association* rather than a cause and effect relationship, and do not indicate that acidosis is directly harmful. The systemic haemodynamic effects of hypercapnic acidosis are relatively benign, even as the pH falls to 7.15, with the typical patient experiencing no change or small increases in cardiac output and blood pressure [33, 34]. There is a body of evidence in the critical care literature attesting to the safety of hypercapnic acidosis. In many studies of patients undergoing permissive hypercapnia, a pH of well below 7.2 appeared to have been well tolerated [19, 20, 33, 35–39]. The safety of hypercapnic acidosis is further supported by reports that individuals, both adults [40] and children [41], have survived exposure to extreme levels. Therefore, although acidosis is common in the setting of critical illness, and may herald an adverse prognosis, it is likely that the aetiology of the underlying condition resulting in the acidosis, rather than the acidosis per se, is the key factor [34, 42]. Indeed acidosis may constitute a protective adaptation in the context of cellular stress, and may in fact constitute beneficial effects in the setting of acute organ injury (Table 1) [42].

The potential for hypercapnia to attenuate to the deleterious effects of high stretch mechanical ventilation in the clinical context has recently received strong support in a preliminary communication [43], where Kregenow and co-workers examined mortality as a function of permissive hypercapnia in patients enrolled in the ARDSnet study [2]. Using multivariate logistic regression analysis, and controlling for other co-morbidities and severity of lung injury, they demonstrated that permissive hypercapnia reduced mortality in patients randomized to the higher tidal volume (12 ml kg<sup>-1</sup>) [43]. However, there was no additional protective effect of permissive hypercapnia in patients randomized to receive the lower tidal volume (6 ml kg<sup>-1</sup>) [43]. Nevertheless, the potential for hypercapnia to protect against the deleterious effects of mechanical ventilation, is clear (Fig. 1).

**Table 1** Published studies of induced hypercapnic acidosis in models of acute organ dysfunction. *ALI* acute lung injury, *IR* ischaemia-reperfusion,  $K_{fc}$  capillary filtration coefficient,  $P_{aw}$  peak airway pressure,  $P_{cap}$  pulmonary capillary pressure,  $P_{iso}$  pulmonary capillary isographic pressure,  $A-a O_2$  gradient alveolar-arterial oxygen gradient, *BALF* bronchoalveolar lavage fluid,  $TNF\alpha$  tumour necrosis factor alpha, *NO* nitric oxide, *NMDA* N-methyl-D-aspartate

	Animal model	Injury process	Key findings
<b>Acute lung injury</b>			
Shibata et al. 1998 [44]	Ex vivo isolated perfused (rabbit) lung	1. Lung free radical induced ALI 2. Lung ischemia — reperfusion-induced ALI	1. HCA attenuated indices of ALI ( $K_{fc}$ , $P_{aw}$ , $P_{cap}$ , $P_{iso}$ ) 2. HCA attenuated indices of ALI ( $K_{fc}$ , $P_{aw}$ , $P_{cap}$ , $P_{iso}$ )
Laffey et al. 2000 [45]	Ex vivo isolated perfused (rabbit) lung	Lung ischemia — reperfusion	Acidosis attenuated indices of ALI ( $K_{fc}$ , $P_{aw}$ , $P_{cap}$ , $P_{iso}$ ). Hypercapnic acidosis more protective than metabolic acidosis. Buffering of hypercapnic acidosis abolished protective effect.
Laffey et al. 2000 [46]	In vivo whole animal (rabbit) model	Lung ischemia — reperfusion	HCA attenuated indices of ALI (lung permeability, $A-a O_2$ gradient, compliance, $P_{aw}$ ) and inflammation (BALF $TNF\alpha$ , free radical injury) following unilateral lung IR. Potential mechanisms included attenuation of nitro-tyrosine formation, and attenuation of lung apoptosis. HCA attenuated indices of ALI (lung permeability, BALF protein, $K_{fc}$ ). Potential mechanism attenuation of lung NO formation.
Broccard et al. 2001 [49]	Ex vivo isolated perfused (rabbit) lung	Ventilator-induced high lung stretch	HCA attenuated indices of ALI (lung permeability, BALF protein, $K_{fc}$ ). Potential mechanism attenuation of lung NO formation.
Sinclair et al. 2002 [50]	In vivo whole animal (rabbit) model	Ventilator-induced high lung stretch	HCA attenuated indices of ALI (lung permeability, $A-a O_2$ gradient, compliance, histologic injury) and inflammation (BALF neutrophils).
Laffey et al. 2003 [47]	In vivo whole animal (rat) model	Mesenteric Ischemia-Reperfusion	HCA attenuated indices of ALI (lung permeability, $A-a O_2$ gradient, compliance, $P_{AW}$ ) following Mesenteric IR. HCA was protective if applied following initiation of mesenteric reperfusion, indicating therapeutic potential.
Laffey et al. 2003 [51]	In vivo whole animal (rabbit) model	Ventilator-induced high lung stretch	HCA attenuated ( $A-a O_2$ gradient) while hypocapnic alkalosis worsened ( $P_{AW}$ ) indices of ALI.
<b>Myocardial Injury</b>			
Nomura et al. 1994 [52]	Ex vivo isolated perfused (neonatal lamb) heart	Myocardial ischemia — reperfusion	HCA improved postischemic myocardial function
Kitakaze et al. 1997 [53]	In vivo whole animal (rabbit) model	Myocardial ischemia — reperfusion	Metabolic acidosis to an equivalent pH did not improve postischemic function Acidosis (hypercapnic and metabolic) during reperfusion decreased myocardial infarct size
<b>Neurologic Injury</b>			
Vannucci et al. 1995 [54]	In vivo whole animal (rat) model	Unilateral common carotid artery occlusion, followed by hypoxia	HCA decreased histologic brain damage
Vannucci et al. 1997 [55]	In vivo whole animal (rat) model	Unilateral common carotid artery occlusion, followed by hypoxia	Dose response seen with 6% $CO_2$ more neuroprotective than 9% $CO_2$ HCA decreased histologic brain damage
Vannucci et al. 2001 [73]	In vivo whole animal (rat) model	Unilateral common carotid artery occlusion, followed by hypoxia	Mechanisms may include improved cerebral blood flow and attenuation of NMDA receptor activation. Severe HCA (15% $CO_2$ ) worsened histologic brain damage

## **Hypercapnia and acidosis — insights from laboratory models**

It is not currently feasible to examine the direct effects of hypercapnic acidosis, independent of ventilator strategy, in humans. However, important insights may be gained from evaluation of the direct effects of hypercapnia and acidosis in experimental models of organ injury (Table 1).

### Protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis

There is an evolving body of evidence suggesting that hypercapnic acidosis exerts biologically important beneficial effects in experimental models (Table 1). Hypercapnic acidosis directly attenuates both primary [44–46] and secondary [47] ischaemia-reperfusion-induced ALI, without reductions in lung stretch. Hypercapnic acidosis also directly protects against free-radical-induced ALI [44] and endotoxin-induced lung injury independent of ventilation strategy [48]. In addition, hypercapnic acidosis attenuates lung injury induced by excessive lung stretch in both ex vivo [49] and in vivo [50, 51] models, by a surfactant independent mechanism [51].

Hypercapnic acidosis may also protect other vital organs from injury (Table 1). In the heart, reperfusion with a hypercapnic acidotic perfusate potentiates recovery of myocardial function following prolonged ischaemia ex vivo [52] and limits myocardial infarct size for in vivo [53] models. In the brain, hypercapnic acidosis attenuates hypoxic-ischaemic brain injury in the immature rat [54, 55]. Hypercapnic acidosis protects the porcine brain from hypoxia/reoxygenation-induced injury [56]. Hypercapnic acidosis is more effective than comparable degrees of metabolic acidosis in prevention of lipid peroxidation in cortical homogenates [57].

### Beneficial effects — acidosis or hypercapnia?

While it is widely accepted that reduction in pH has profound effects on normal tissue function, it is also clear that hypercapnia per se, in the absence of alterations in pH, may exert biologically important physiologic effects distinct from those produced by acidosis. Of potential importance in the context of acute lung injury, hypercapnia per se exerts effects on systemic [58] and pulmonary vascular tone [58, 59] and pulmonary vascular remodeling [60] that are increasingly well characterized. Thus, the protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis may be a function of the acidosis or the hypercapnia per se. This issue is of particular relevance when considering the appropriateness of buffering in the clinical context. If any protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis were found to result from the acidosis, then efforts to buffer a hypercapnic acidosis would lessen such protection and should

be discouraged. Conversely, if hypercapnia per se (*and not the acidemia*) were found to be protective, then further research efforts should be directed to finding better buffering strategies in order to maximise the benefits of hypercapnia.

There is increasing evidence that the protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis in ALI appear to be a function of the acidosis, rather than elevated CO<sub>2</sub> per se [45, 61]. Hypercapnia at normal pH caused injury to alveolar epithelial cell monolayers [61] and decreased surfactant protein A function in vitro [62]. In the isolated lung, the protective effect of hypercapnic acidosis in ischaemia reperfusion induced ALI was greatly attenuated if the pH was buffered towards normal [45]. In fact there appeared to be no significant protective effect detectable with buffered hypercapnia (Table 1). Conversely, normocapnic (i.e. metabolic) acidosis attenuates primary ischaemia-reperfusion induced ALI in an ex vivo model, although it is less effective than hypercapnic acidosis in this model [45].

The protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis in models of systemic organ injury also appear to be a function of the acidosis. The myocardial protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis are also seen with metabolic acidosis both in ex vivo [63] and in vivo [53, 64] models. In cortical brain homogenates, the protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis are also seen with metabolic acidosis, albeit to a lesser extent [57]. Metabolic acidosis appears to exert protective effects in other models of organ injury. In the liver, metabolic acidosis delays the onset of cell death in isolated hepatocytes exposed to anoxia [65] and to chemical hypoxia [66, 67]. Correcting the pH to 7.4 abolished the protective effect and in fact accelerated hepatocyte cell death [67]. Finally, isolated renal cortical tubules exposed to anoxia have improved ATP levels on reoxygenation at acidotic — compared with alkalotic — environmental pH levels [65].

### Hypercapnic acidosis — underlying mechanisms

The models of ALI and ARDS are not precise representations of the clinical context; indeed most clinical scenarios differ from each other. Therefore, it is important to understand the cellular and biochemical mechanisms underlying the protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis if we are to be able to apply the findings to the bedside, and particularly, to extrapolate the principles to a variety of disease states. Hypercapnic acidosis attenuates key components of the host inflammatory response, including: lung neutrophil recruitment [48], pulmonary and systemic cytokine concentrations [46], cell apoptosis [46, 68], and both free-radical production [44, 45] and free-radical tissue injury [46, 57]. In the brain, hypercapnic acidosis attenuates glutathione depletion and lipid peroxidation [56]. One promising potential mechanism underlying

these protective actions of hypercapnic acidosis is attenuation of the activation of the transcription regulator nuclear factor kappa beta (NF- $\kappa$ B) [69]. NF- $\kappa$ B regulates the expression of several genes involved in inflammatory response and its activation represents a pivotal early step in the activation of the inflammatory response.

### Concerns regarding hypercapnia

There are concerns regarding the potential for hypercapnia and/or acidosis to exert deleterious effects that suggest the need for caution when considering its use in the clinical context. The potential for hypercapnic acidosis to exert adverse haemodynamic effects in patients with ARDS is clear [70]. However, the potential for detrimental effects on cardiac output [71] and on the peripheral circulation [72] may be overstated. In addition, beneficial effects of moderate hypercapnia may be counterbalanced by a potential for adverse effects at higher levels. This is supported by the experimental evidence demonstrating that protection from the adverse effects of brain ischaemia was better when the inspired CO<sub>2</sub> was set at 6% rather than at 9% [54]. Of concern, severe hypercapnia produced by 15% CO<sub>2</sub> has been more recently demonstrated to worsen neurologic injury in this context (Table 1) [73]. In isolated hepatocytes, the degree of protection from anoxic injury conferred by a metabolic acidosis was greater at pH 6.9 than at pH 6.6 [65]. Furthermore, acidosis attenuates the neutrophil respiratory burst and superoxide production, which are necessary for neutrophil bactericidal activity [74]. This may impair bacterial killing, resulting in unopposed bacterial proliferation, with deleterious consequences, in patients with sepsis induced ARDS.

There are reports of lung [75] and intestinal [76] injury following induction of metabolic acidosis by hydrochloric acid infusion in whole animal models. However, it is important to recognise that infusion of hyperosmolar solutions of strong acids into whole animal preparations may produce toxic effects close to the infusion site and adverse systemic effects, at least some of which are unrelated to any change in pH [77]. Thus, the effects of infusion of strong acid in any given experiment *in vivo* is likely to represent the sum of potentially beneficial and adverse actions. This contrasts with the situation with hypercapnic acidosis, which is easy to produce, is well tolerated, and does not produce toxic local effects. In ex vivo experiments, where changes in pH and/or PCO<sub>2</sub> can be produced independently, and without the need for acid infusion close to the tissue, metabolic acidosis is directly protective against ischaemia-reperfusion induced ALI [45].

Of perhaps more concern is the potential for hypercapnia to increase tissue nitration. Peroxynitrite is a potent free radical produced *in vivo* largely by the

reaction of nitric oxide with superoxide radicals, which are greatly increased in acute inflammatory states [78–80]. Peroxynitrite oxidizes a variety of biomolecules including sulfides, thiols, lipids, nucleic acids, transition metals and selenoproteins [78–80]. These oxidation reactions result in altered cellular function and tissue damage. Peroxynitrite also causes nitration of phenolic amino acid residues in proteins, including tyrosine residues, which leads to alteration of protein function [78, 79, 81, 82]. Two recent *in vitro* studies demonstrate that increased CO<sub>2</sub> and a reduction in pH below the normal physiological value inhibit oxidation by peroxynitrite while promoting nitration reactions [83, 84]. The potential for hypercapnia to promote the formation of nitration products from peroxynitrite has been clearly demonstrated in recent *in vitro* experiments [61, 62]. Peroxynitrite-mediated tissue nitration has been suggested to be a key mechanism of tissue damage in inflammatory conditions, including ALI [78, 79, 81, 82].

Finally, an important limitation when extrapolating to the clinical context is the relatively short duration of the ALI models in which hypercapnic acidosis has been studied to date. The common clinical scenario in ARDS patients is that of a more prolonged hypercapnia, during which time the acidosis may be partially, or even completely, compensated. As we have seen, there is reason to believe that the acidosis generated by acute hypercapnia may be the protective factor in acute models of ALI. The need to study the effects of hypercapnia in ALI models of considerably longer duration is therefore clear.

In summary, these findings demonstrate that hypercapnic acidosis, induced by direct administration of CO<sub>2</sub>, is protective in multiple models of acute lung and systemic organ injury. These protective effects appear to be a function of the acidosis rather than the hypercapnia *per se*. While significant concerns remain regarding hypercapnia, in particular, its potential to increase tissue nitration, the potential for hypercapnia to attenuate acute lung and systemic organ injury is clear (Fig. 1).

### Hypercapnia — with or without buffering?

Buffering of the acidosis induced by hypercapnia in ARDS patients remains a common, albeit controversial, clinical practice [85, 86]. Buffering with sodium bicarbonate was permitted in the ARDSnet study [2]. The need to examine the effects of buffering a hypercapnic acidosis is emphasised by the fact that both hypercapnia and acidosis *per se* may exert distinct biologic effects. However, as already discussed, there is evidence that the protective effects of hypercapnic acidosis in ALI are a function of the acidosis, rather than elevated CO<sub>2</sub> *per se* [45, 61]. In addition, there are specific concerns regarding the use of bicarbonate to correct an acidosis. These

concerns have resulted in the removal of bicarbonate therapy from routine use in cardiac arrest algorithms [87, 88]. The effectiveness of bicarbonate infusion as a buffer is dependent on the ability to excrete CO<sub>2</sub>, rendering it less effective in buffering a hypercapnic acidosis. In fact, bicarbonate may further raise systemic CO<sub>2</sub> levels under conditions of reduced alveolar ventilation, such as ARDS [89]. While bicarbonate may correct arterial pH, it may worsen an intracellular acidosis because the CO<sub>2</sub> produced when bicarbonate reacts with metabolic acids diffuses readily across cell membranes, whereas bicarbonate cannot [90]. Bicarbonate may exert detrimental effects when used to buffer a lactic acidosis. The potential for bicarbonate infusion to augment the production of lactic acid has been demonstrated in the experimental and clinical setting [91–97]. Bicarbonate infusion exerted deleterious cardiovascular effects in a model of hypoxia-induced lactic acidosis [93, 94]. The safety of bicarbonate in diabetic patients has also been questioned. Bicarbonate administration slowed the rate of decrease of ketoacids in patients with diabetic ketoacidosis [98]. Of even more concern, bicarbonate administration is associated with a four-fold increase in risk of cerebral oedema in children with diabetic ketoacidosis [99].

The administration of sodium bicarbonate constitutes a significant osmolar load, which may exert independent beneficial effects independent of any associated changes in pH. Osmolar loads, such as hypertonic saline, may improve the haemodynamic profile in hemorrhagic shock [100], attenuate key aspects of the immune response [100–102] and prevent organ injury in experimental models [101–103]. In fact, when compared with an equimolar dose of sodium chloride, bicarbonate administration does not improve the hemodynamic status of critically ill patients who have lactic acidosis [104]. A follow-up study in an in vivo model of lactic acidemia found that bicarbonate exerted haemodynamic effects (mean arterial pressure, cardiac output, left ventricular contractility), which were indistinguishable from those seen in response to an equimolar dose of sodium chloride [105]. These data give cause for concern about the practice of buffering metabolic acidosis, and comparable questions may exist in the setting of hypercapnic acidosis.

There may be a role for the use of buffers, such as the amino alcohol tromethamine (tris-hydroxymethyl aminomethane, THAM), in specific situations where the physiologic effects of hypercapnic acidosis are of concern. THAM penetrates cells easily and can buffer pH changes and simultaneously reduce PCO<sub>2</sub> [106]. Unlike bicarbonate, which requires an open system for CO<sub>2</sub> elimination in order to exert its buffering effect, THAM is effective in a closed or semi-closed system [106]. THAM rapidly restores pH and acid-base regulation in acidaemia caused by CO<sub>2</sub> retention [106]. A common rationale for buffering is to ameliorate the haemodynamic

consequences of acidosis. In a small, but carefully performed clinical study in ARDS patients, rapid induction of a hypercapnic acidosis for a two-hour period resulted in significant hemodynamic alterations, including decreased systemic vascular resistance, increased cardiac output, decreased myocardial contractility, decreased mean arterial pressure and increased mean pulmonary arterial pressure [70]. Buffering of the hypercapnic acidosis with THAM rapidly attenuated the haemodynamic alterations and restored myocardial contractility in these patients [70].

In summary, although it is a widely accepted clinical practice, there are no long-term clinical outcome data (e.g., survival, duration of hospital stay) to support the practice of buffering a hypercapnic acidosis. Taken together, the above literature suggests that, in the absence of correcting the primary problem, buffering a hypercapnic acidosis with bicarbonate is not likely to be of benefit. If the clinician elects to buffer a hypercapnic acidosis, the rationale for this practice should be clear (e.g. to ameliorate potentially deleterious haemodynamic consequences of acidosis). THAM may have a role in these clinical situations.

## Conclusions

The optimal ventilatory strategy, and the role of ‘permissive hypercapnia’ in that strategy, is not yet clear. The protective effect of reducing lung stretch in improving outcome in ARDS patients are beyond doubt. There is growing evidence to support the contention that hypercapnic acidosis may contribute to the benefits seen with protective lung ventilation. While direct induction of a hypercapnic acidosis is protective in multiple models of acute lung and systemic organ injury, the potential for hypercapnia to increase peroxynitrite-mediated tissue nitration is of concern and requires further investigation.

At present, ventilatory strategies that involve hypercapnia are clinically acceptable only provided the clinician is primarily targeting reduced tidal stretch. There are insufficient clinical data to suggest that hypercapnia per se should be independently induced, outside the context of a protective ventilatory strategy. Furthermore, the recent questioning of the real benefit of low — versus moderate — tidal volume ventilation for adults with ARDS may result in hypercapnia becoming less acceptable in the ventilatory management of ARDS. If that becomes the case, then the clinical study of hypercapnia will become less feasible in the setting of permissive hypercapnia, and will require the deliberate induction of hypercapnia (i.e., ‘therapeutic’ hypercapnia). Pre-clinical studies are urgently needed to clarify the advantages, disadvantages, and optimal use of hypercapnia in ARDS.

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François Jardin  
Antoine Vieillard-Baron

## **Right ventricular function and positive pressure ventilation in clinical practice: from hemodynamic subsets to respiratory settings**

duced venous return may, in the same way, be explained by the drop in cardiac output.

We have been interested for about 30 years in the hemodynamic consequences of mechanical ventilation in ARDS patients, and here we try to summarize our experience in this clinical commentary to enable a logical approach to ventilator settings. The major goal of this approach will be to avoid imposing an excessive load on the right ventricle. Our experience was first acquired with right heart catheterization, and later by bedside echocardiography. Recent physiological notes published in the present journal have underscored some of the drawbacks of the invasive method [1, 2] and illustrated the advantage of echocardiography [3]. The clinical results of our respiratory strategy in ARDS has been published recently [4].

The hemodynamic consequences of mechanical ventilation are easy to understand by examining the impact upon the right ventricle of applying a positive airway pressure. On the one hand, cyclic (tidal ventilation) or continuous (PEEP application) changes in transpulmonary pressure produced by respiratory support directly affect RV outflow impedance. On the other hand, cyclic (tidal ventilation) or continuous (PEEP application) increase in pleural pressure produced by respiratory support increases RV effective elastance, a factor limiting diastolic filling.

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### **Introduction**

When used in patients free of previous cardiorespiratory disease, mechanical ventilation with a normal tidal volume does not have any discernible hemodynamic consequences. Conversely, the presence of a pulmonary disease affecting the bronchial tree, lung parenchyma, or both, may induce extreme conditions for mechanical ventilation. In this setting, an adverse hemodynamic effect may seriously complicate respiratory support.

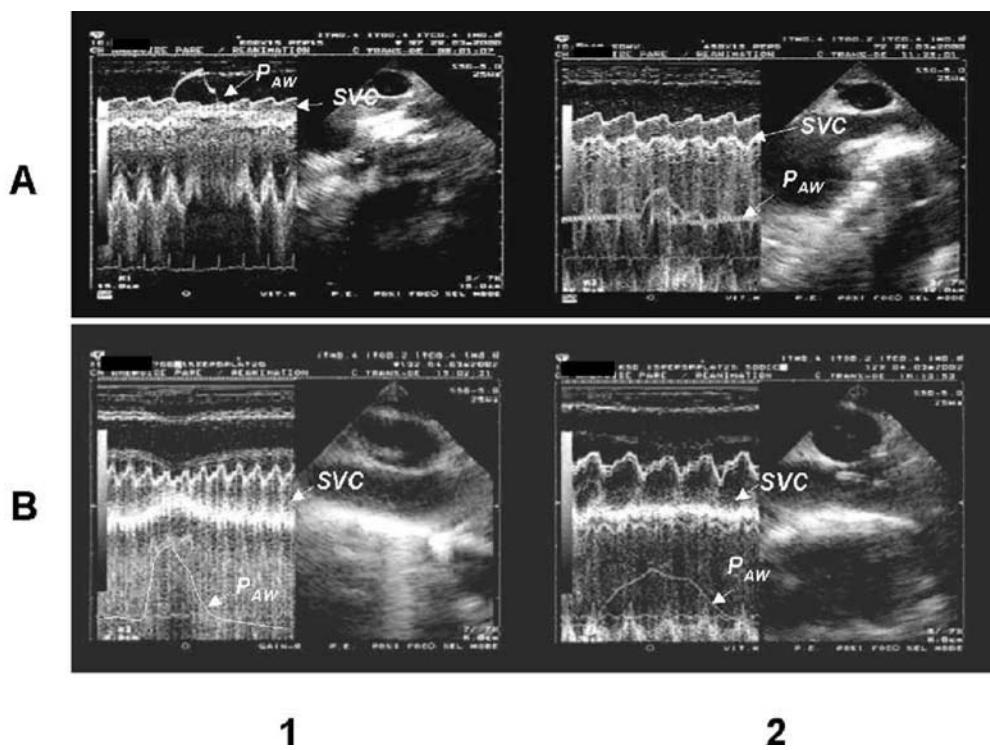
The drop in cardiac output occurring in extreme conditions of mechanical ventilation is usually attributed to a reduced venous return. But the terms "cardiac output" on the one hand and "venous return" on the other refer to the same phenomenon. From a physiological point of view, such an explanation is insufficient, because re-

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### **The "venous return" concept**

As established by Guyton, the venous return is promoted by a forward pressure, the mean systemic pressure, and impaired by a backward pressure, the right atrial pressure [5]. For several decades it was believed that positive pressure ventilation, by increasing pleural pressure, decreased the pressure gradient for venous return. In 1991, Fessler et al., working in S. Permutt's group, demonstrated in an experimental study in dogs that positive airway

**Fig. 1** Transesophageal echocardiographic examination of the superior vena cava (SVC) in the *long axis* (with the M-mode study on the *left* and the two-dimensional imaging on the *right* of each record) in two different patients (A and B). On the left panel (1), SVC collapse was observed in these patients during tidal ventilation (airway pressure,  $P_{AW}$ , was monitored on the M-mode recording). This collapse was prevented in both patients by blood volume expansion, as illustrated on the right panel (2)



1

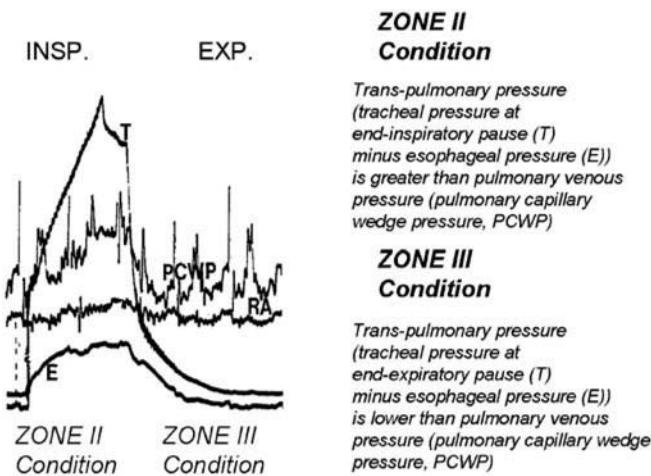
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pressure did not affect the gradient for venous return, because pleural pressure was transmitted to the same extent to both the mean systemic and right atrial pressures [6]. Van den Berg et al. [7] demonstrated in a recent clinical study that a sustained increase in airway pressure did not decrease venous return because of a concomitant increase in abdominal pressure, an operative mechanism in volume loaded patients, with the inferior vena cava in a zone 3 condition [8]. Also, Fessler et al. observed in another experimental study that venous return was actually reduced by positive pressure ventilation, despite a maintained pressure gradient [9]. They concluded that venous conductance was reduced (or venous resistance was increased) when airway pressure was increased, probably because a collapsible vascular zone was interposed between mean systemic pressure and right atrial pressure [9]. Recently, Jellinek et al. confirmed the validity of this concept in humans, and suggested that liver circulation might constitute this collapsible vascular zone sensitive to pleural pressure transmission throughout the diaphragm [10].

We have also observed another collapsible vascular zone at the level of the thoracic part of the superior vena cava [11]. Placed in a zone 2 condition in a hypovolemic patient, the superior vena cava may partially collapse during tidal ventilation, thus transiently limiting RV filling (Fig. 1, Electronic Supplementary Material Film 1A, B and C). The same phenomenon is not observed at the level of the inferior vena cava, because the thoracic part of this vessel is virtual in humans [11].

### Changes in transpulmonary pressure and the impact on right ventricular outflow impedance

Applying the concept of the Starling resistor to the pulmonary circulation, S. Permutt and his co-workers described the relation between the pressures promoting blood flow through the pulmonary circulation [12]. A forward pressure, the pulmonary artery pressure, boosts blood through the pulmonary vascular bed, and a backward pressure, the pulmonary venous pressure, impedes this flow (zone 3 condition). However, alveolar pressure, which directly acts externally on the pulmonary capillary bed, may behave as backward pressure if it rises above venous pressure (zone 2 condition). During tidal volume ventilation, the increase in airway pressure produces an increased zone 2 at the expense of zone 3 (Fig. 2). Thus, during tidal ventilation, alveolar pressure, acting as the backward pressure, impedes pulmonary blood flow. This phenomenon may be important in a mechanically ventilated supine patient. If we assume an average pulmonary venous pressure at the level of the mid-axillary line of 16.5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (12 mmHg), and a 12 cm height between the mid-axillary line and the anterior chest wall, the pulmonary venous pressure in the anterior area of the lungs should be close to 4.5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (i.e., 16.5–12). Thus, in this area, a transpulmonary pressure of 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O would produce a permanent zone 2 condition. Conversely, because of an equal height of 12 cm between the posterior chest wall and the mid-ax-



**Fig. 2** An example of simultaneous recording of esophageal pressure (*E*), reflecting pleural pressure, right atrial pressure (*RA*), pulmonary capillary wedge pressure (*PCWP*), reflecting pulmonary venous pressure, and tracheal pressure (*T*). During the period of no-flow (end-inspiratory pause and end-expiration), *T* reflects alveolar pressure. Whereas a zone 3 condition is observed at end-expiration (*PCWP>T*), a zone 2 condition is realized at end-inspiration (*T>PCWP*). Also note that the increase in *E* during mechanical inspiration is accompanied by a similar increase in *PCWP*

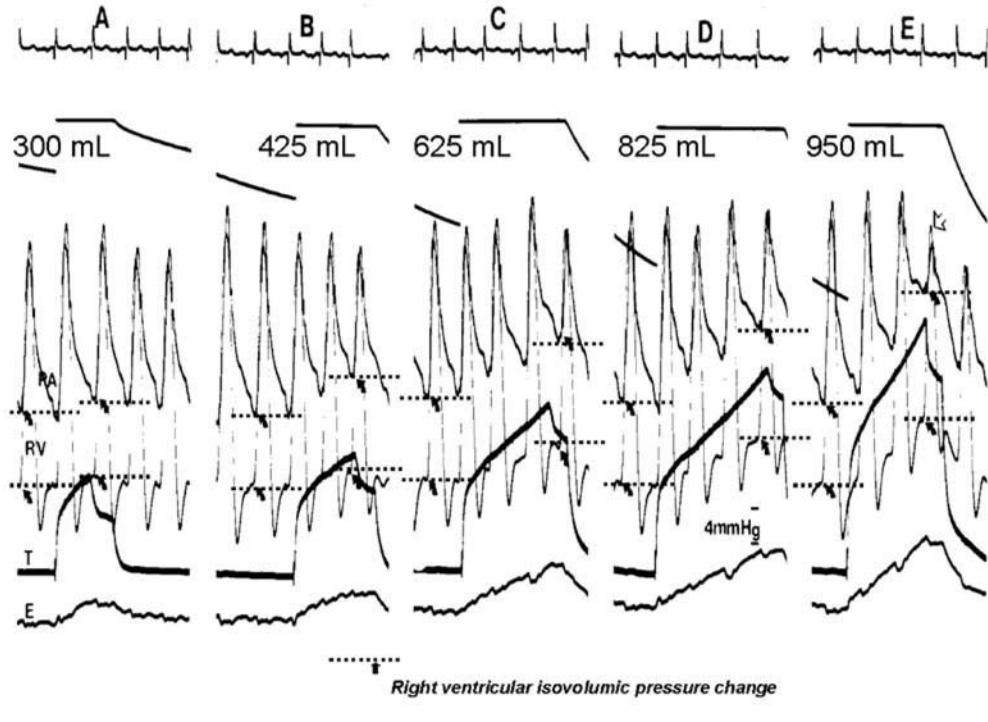
illary level, dependent areas of the lung are protected against a zone 2 condition.

In fact, it is not alveolar pressure in the strict sense of the term that constitutes backward pressure during tidal ventilation, but alveolar distending pressure (i.e., trans-pulmonary pressure) as we have recently demonstrated in a clinical study, using chest strapping, a procedure that increases alveolar pressure without a concomitant increase in transpulmonary pressure [13].

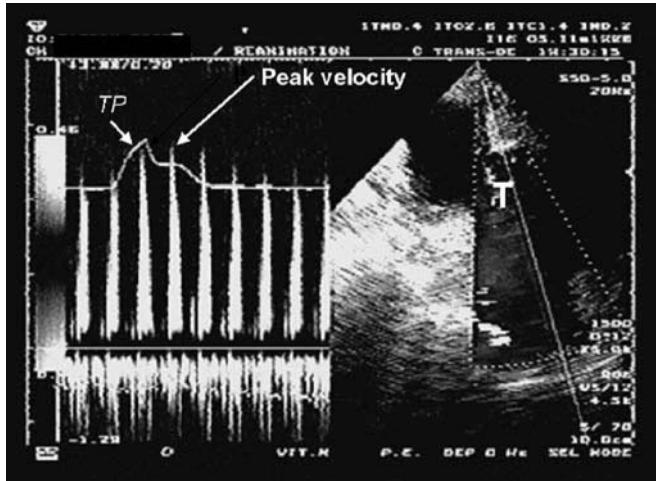
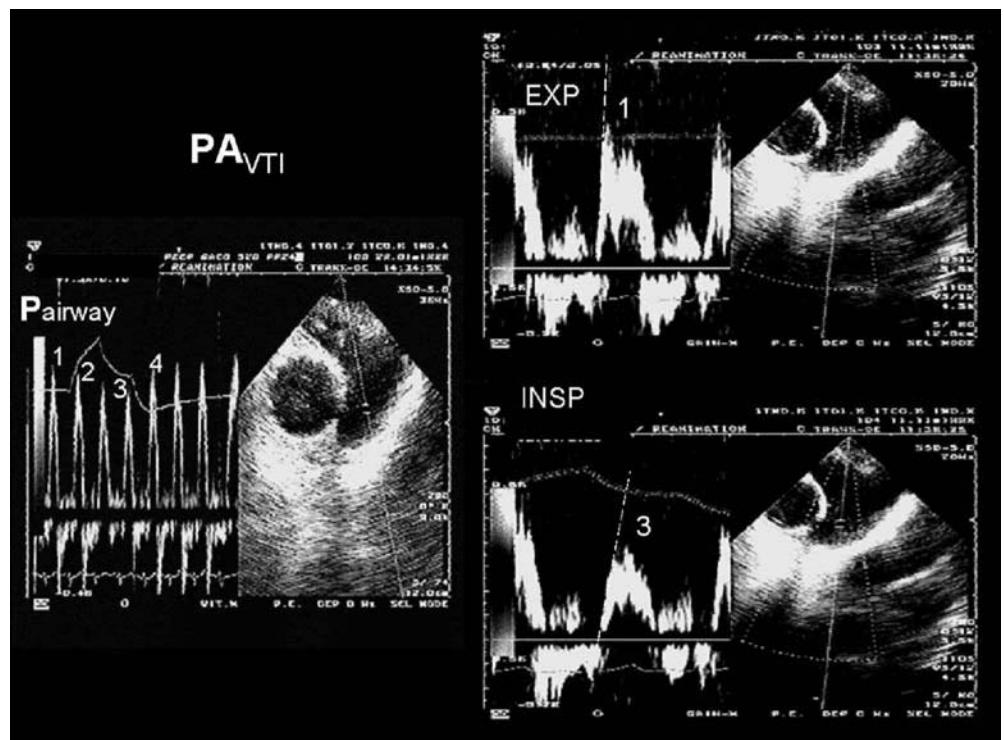
By recording simultaneously pulmonary artery and right ventricular pressures in mechanically ventilated patients, we have observed in the past the relation between transpulmonary pressure and right ventricular outflow impedance: when tidal volume is progressively increased, the right ventricle has to develop a more and more elevated pressure to open the pulmonary artery valve (Fig. 3) [14]. We have recently confirmed these results by Doppler analysis of changes in pulmonary artery velocity (Fig. 4, Electronic Supplementary Material Film 2A, B) [13]. Increased transpulmonary pressure during tidal ventilation sharply reduces mean acceleration of blood in the pulmonary artery (Fig. 4), whereas an isolated increase in airway pressure without change in transpulmonary pressure does not affect blood velocity in the pulmonary artery [13].

Indirect evidence of RV afterloading is also provided by the frequency of tricuspid regurgitation during mechanical ventilation [15], which can also be induced by PEEP [16]. An example is given in Fig. 5.

**Fig. 3** Simultaneous recordings of expiratory volume (*EV*, mL), pulmonary artery pressure (*PA*, mmHg), right ventricular pressure (*RV*, mmHg), tracheal pressure (*T*, mmHg) and esophageal pressure (*E*, mmHg), during a progressive increase in tidal volume from 300 to 950 mL. This progressive increase in tidal ventilation required a progressive increase in the pressure developed by the RV during its isovolumetric contraction to open the pulmonic valve (i.e., the difference between pulmonary artery diastolic pressure, small closed arrow, and right ventricular end-diastolic pressure, small closed arrow). Note also that, with the highest tidal volume (right panel, *E*), pulmonary artery pulse became negligible (small open arrow)



**Fig. 4** Cyclic changes in pulmonary artery Doppler flow velocity during tidal ventilation. On the left panel these changes are recorded at low speed, illustrating the drop in peak velocity between beat 1 (end-expiratory beat) and beat 2 occurring during the dynamic phase of lung inflation. This drop was accentuated during beat 3, occurring at the end-inspiratory pause, and peak velocity start to return to its baseline value during beat 4, occurring at the onset of expiration. On the right panel, recording at high speed demonstrated the associated drop in mean acceleration (i.e., peak velocity divided by acceleration time), which is depicted by the slope of the broken line drawn on the initial part of the Doppler profile on beat 1 and beat 3



**Fig. 5** Examined with a simultaneous recording of tracheal pressure (TP), recording of continuous Doppler backward flow velocity at the level of tricuspid valve (T) illustrates the increase in peak velocity produced by tidal ventilation

### PEEP-related changes in transpulmonary pressure and their hemodynamic impact

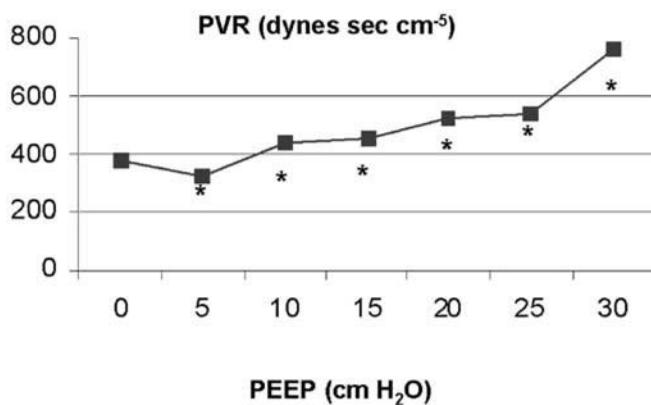
In 1975, P. Suter described “best PEEP” as a PEEP resulting in “optimum” oxygen transport in ARDS patients [17]. This PEEP was easy to determine, because it was

also associated with the best value of a two-point (quasi-static) compliance of the respiratory system ( $C_{RS}$ ) [17].

This “best PEEP” was relatively low ( $8 \pm 4$  cmH<sub>2</sub>O, personal communication from P. Suter). If we assume that changes in  $C_{RS}$  in ARDS essentially reflect changes in static compliance of the lung ( $C_L$ ), we can conclude that the “best PEEP” described by Suter reduced, for a given tidal volume, the required transpulmonary pressure. Thus, a lesser impact of tidal ventilation on right ventricular function should be expected when this PEEP is applied.

This hemodynamic improvement was actually present in Suter’s work, where application of the “best PEEP” did not decrease cardiac output despite increased pleural pressure [17]. In accord with Suter’s findings, we observed in 1981 that cardiac output was maintained at a low PEEP (<10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O), despite pleural pressure increase ( $-0.6+0.4$  mmHg at ZEEP, versus  $0.9+1.9$  mmHg with PEEP=10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, end-expiratory values) [18]. Conversely, above this PEEP cardiac output fell significantly [18]. Recently, we have corroborated this beneficial hemodynamic effect of a low PEEP by Doppler examination of pulmonary artery flow velocity [19] (Electronic Supplementary Material Film 3A,B).

In Suter’s study,  $C_{RS}$  was a two-point compliance, calculated as tidal volume divided by plateau pressure minus end-expiratory pressure. The latter was assumed to be external PEEP, because the phenomenon of intrinsic PEEP was unknown at this time. If corrected for intrinsic PEEP [20], which was likely present in ARDS pa-



**Fig. 6** Average change in pulmonary vascular resistance (PVR) during a progressive increase in PEEP in ten ARDS patients studied in 1981 [10]. Error bars are omitted for clarity. PVR was calculated using left ventricular end diastolic pressure measured at end-expiration by the Seldinger method, as reflecting pulmonary venous pressure. Note that PVR was significantly improved at a low PEEP, and was worsened on increasing PEEP above this level (\* $P<0.05$ )

tients receiving a high tidal volume (13–15 ml/kg), the  $C_{RS}$  in Suter's patients would have probably been unchanged by "best PEEP" application, and the reason for the beneficial hemodynamic effect of this PEEP would probably not be an actual mechanical improvement, permitting reduction in transpulmonary pressure. In the study referred to above [18], we also observed a significant reduction in pulmonary vascular resistance with a

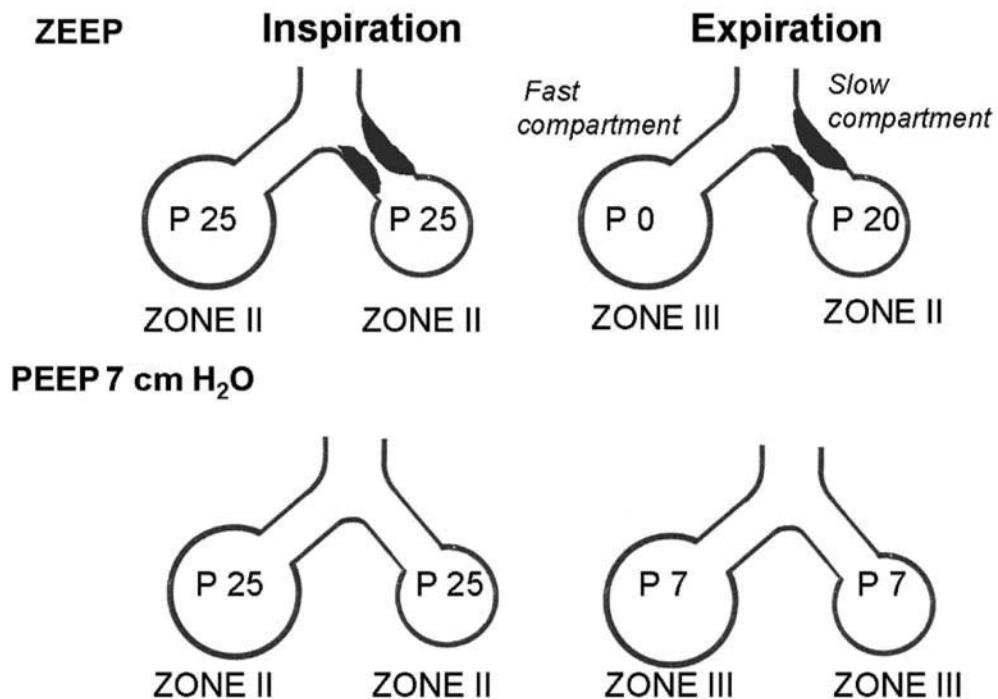
low PEEP (between 3 and 8 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, Fig. 6). As we have recently emphasized, a "slow compartment" is usually present at a relatively low supportive respiratory rate in ARDS patients, and produces gas trapping [21]. This gas trapping may be responsible for a permanent zone 2 condition in a limited area, and an increased vascular resistance in this specific area. Relieving gas trapping by a low PEEP [21] thus improves blood flow and reduces vascular resistance (Fig. 7).

#### Effect of an increase in pleural pressure on RV effective diastolic elastance

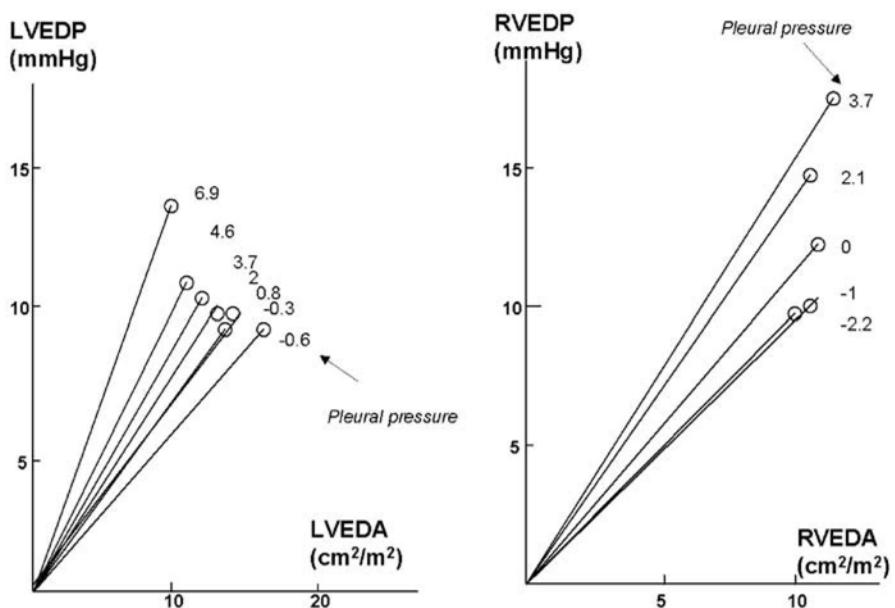
Pleural pressure is transmitted integrally to the pericardial space [22]. Thus, any increase in pleural pressure induces an increase in pericardial pressure, which limits the distending capacity of the cardiac cavities. During diastole, when pleural pressure is increased, a higher filling pressure is necessary to obtain an adequate end-diastolic volume. We have illustrated in the past the changes in left [18] and right [23] ventricular effective elastance occurring in clinical settings when pleural pressure is progressively increased by raising PEEP, and a schematic representation of these changes is shown in Fig. 8.

As a clinical consequence, a high central venous pressure ( $>10$  mmHg) is required in a mechanically ventilated patient to put the right ventricle on the flat part of its function curve, thus rendering it somewhat insensitive to cyclic change in elastance produced by tidal ventilation

**Fig. 7** A schematic representation of the adverse hemodynamic effect of the slow compartment in ARDS. On the top left panel, tidal ventilation with ZEEP produces a plateau pressure of 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, which creates a zone 2 condition. On the top right panel, airway pressure in the fast compartment returns to zero at end-expiration with ZEEP, restoring a zone 3 condition, whereas the slow compartment, which cannot empty, is responsible for a permanent zone 2 condition in the corresponding vascular area. On the bottom panel, tidal ventilation with PEEP also creates a zone 2 condition (left), but the low PEEP of 7 cmH<sub>2</sub>O suppresses the slow compartment, so that no zone 2 condition persists at expiration (right)



**Fig. 8** Simultaneous recording of left ventricular end-diastolic pressure by left ventricular catheterization (*LVEDP*) and right ventricular end-diastolic pressure by right heart catheterization (*RVEDP*) simultaneously with left (*L*) and (*R*) ventricular end-diastolic areas (*EDA*) by two-dimensional echocardiography illustrated the changes in left (left panel) and right (right panel) ventricular elastance (the slope of the relation) occurring with a progressive increase in pleural pressure produced by a step-by-step application of PEEP. These diagrams were constructed with the data of [18, 23]



[24]. But central venous pressure may be misleading as a monitoring parameter because it is sensitive to venous elastance, which may differ from patient to patient. In our experience, observation of superior vena caval diameter by TEE is fundamental in ensuring that the right ventricle will be on the flat part of its function curve: this is likely the case when cyclic changes in pleural pressure only slightly affect vena caval diameter [11] (Electronic Supplementary Material Films 1A,B,C).

### What is the net result of these opposite effects on right ventricular size?

Changes in RV dimensions produced by tidal ventilation or by PEEP application have given apparently conflicting results, some authors emphasizing a reduction in RV dimensions [25], whereas we have demonstrated an increase in RV dimensions [23, 26]. In fact these results are perfectly coherent because, as we have discussed, the two effects of increasing airway pressure have opposite consequences for RV dimensions. Whereas an increase in RV outflow impedance tends to reduce ejection and increase end-diastolic volume (afterload effect, Electronic Supplementary Material Film 4), an increase in RV diastolic elastance tends to reduce end-diastolic volume (preload effect). Thus, the net effect of these opposite actions on RV size is the result of the preponderance of one over the other.

In 1998, Gattinoni et al. [27] introduced a major distinction in the ARDS classification by individualizing, from a mechanical point of view, two different subgroups. Pulmonary ARDS had a markedly reduced  $C_L$ ,

whereas  $C_W$  was slightly affected in this subgroup. Extrapulmonary ARDS, on the other hand, had a markedly reduced  $C_W$  associated with a relatively preserved  $C_L$ . Thus, in pulmonary ARDS, a higher transpulmonary pressure would be required to deliver a given tidal volume. In this setting, one can expect a preeminent afterload effect. Conversely, in extrapulmonary ARDS, a given tidal volume would markedly increase pleural pressure. In this setting, one can expect a preeminent preload effect. Thus, pulmonary ARDS will be subject to RV enlargement with increasing airway pressure, whereas extrapulmonary ARDS will be subject to RV size reduction.

Both effects may also be successively observed in the same patient, with an initial reduction of RV size with a low PEEP, because a concomitant reduction in preload and afterload reduces RV size, and a final enlargement with a higher PEEP, when the increased afterload effect becomes preeminent [23].

### Hypercapnia, respiratory rate and RV function

Hypercapnia has been experimentally proved as a deleterious factor for an overloaded RV [28]. With the widespread acceptance of a protective ventilation strategy in clinical practice [29, 30, 31, 32], which requires an airway pressure limitation (plateau pressure  $<30$  cmH<sub>2</sub>O), hypercapnia has replaced airway pressure as a direct factor related to acute cor pulmonale in ARDS patients [33, 34]. Clearly, hypercapnia in this setting results from the severity of the disease, but it may only be expressed owing to the new “permissive” respiratory strategy, limiting tidal volume.

Computed tomographic studies in ARDS have illustrated the major reduction in functional alveolar areas observed in this syndrome [35] and have led to the “baby lung” concept. In this concept, ARDS lung is compared to the lung of a baby, admitting only a small tidal volume. Because the respiratory rate of a baby is markedly greater than that of an adult, it has been proposed to limit the level of “permissive” hypercapnia by increasing the respiratory rate [36]. But adult ARDS patients actually exhibited an adult dead space [37], and increasing respiratory rate may produce an adverse intrinsic PEEP [37]. Gas trapping generated by this strategy increased right ventricular outflow impedance [37].

### **From a hemodynamic point of view, what are the best ventilation strategies in ARDS patients?**

First of all, it should be recalled that the differences between cyclic positive airway pressure obtained by tidal ventilation and permanent airway pressure produced by PEEP are profound. Whereas transient increase in inspiratory pressure cannot be adapted because of the fleeting nature of the stress, PEEP induces a steady-state change in cardiovascular conditions, such that altering blood volume by fluid expansion and/or autonomic tone by a vasoactive support usually results in a return to baseline hemodynamic status. However, both interventions may have their own deleterious effects.

In our opinion, a first requirement for a safe mechanical ventilation is to limit transpulmonary pressure. A normal right ventricle may develop a maximal systolic pressure of 30 mmHg. During tidal ventilation, this forward pressure should work against a backward pressure, the transpulmonary pressure. In the past, excessive airway pressure was associated with a high frequency and a marked severity of acute cor pulmonale in ARDS [33]. Airway pressure limitation, which was safely obtained with a medium tidal volume (8 ml/kg of measured body weight) combined with a low PEEP (<10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O), has reduced the incidence and clearly improved the prognosis of acute cor pulmonale in ARDS [34]. Additionally, interposing regular periods of ventilation in the prone position, by reversing hydrostatic pressure and its protective effect against a zone 2 situation, might regularly unload the most exposed upper areas of pulmonary vascular bed.

A second requirement for a safe mechanical ventilation is use of a low respiratory rate. The majority of ARDS patients have a localized expiratory flow limitation constitut-

ing a “slow compartment” [21], which requires a prolonged expiratory time of 4 s to empty [21]. Additionally, a high respiratory rate produces diffuse expiratory flow limitation and enhances gas trapping [37]. Gas trapping increases both pleural pressure and resistance to flow in the pulmonary vascular bed. However, this requirement is probably not absolute and some increase in respiratory rate may be safe, if it is not associated with intrinsic PEEP [36]. This is the case in a small number of ARDS patients, who exhibit a markedly increased elastic recoil of the lung, associated with a negligible slow compartment. Also instrumental dead space reduction may help to correct excessive hypercapnia [36, 38].

A third requirement for a safe mechanical ventilation is to use at least a low PEEP, thus improving blood flow throughout the pulmonary circulation [19]. As previously stated, the “slow compartment” can not empty with ZEEP when the respiratory rate is greater than 10 breaths/min, because it requires an expiration duration of 4 s [21]. As a result, the airway pressure remains high during the expiratory phase in this area, producing a localized and permanent zone 2. Because a low PEEP is able to reintegrate the “slow compartment” [21], it also permits the return of this area to a zone 3 condition during expiration, and a maximal efficacy of a moderate respiratory rate (15 breaths/min) [2]. This PEEP is actually close to that proposed 25 years ago by P. Suter [17].

### **Conclusion**

The introduction of protective ventilation in 1990 by Hickling has greatly improved ARDS outcome [29]. Unknowingly, this author has also provided better working conditions for the RV, and both are probably in part related [39].

Now, the majority of authors interested in respiratory strategy in ARDS focus on complex mechanical studies to evaluate recruitment. Computed tomography (CT) scanning has been proposed for this purpose [40]. Conversely, few authors are concerned by the impact of the respiratory strategy on pulmonary circulation, and this lack of interest parallels the relative fall from grace of the Swan-Ganz catheter, an inaccurate procedure in mechanically ventilated patients [41]. While lung recruitment appears a justified goal in ARDS treatment, the procedure used for this purpose should remain compatible with the integrity of the pulmonary circulation, also required to obtain recovery [42].

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## Acute right ventricular failure— from pathophysiology to new treatments

**Abstract** The right ventricle (RV) provides sustained low-pressure perfusion of the pulmonary vasculature, but is sensitive to changes in loading conditions and intrinsic contractility. Factors that affect right ventricular preload, afterload or left ventricular function can adversely influence the functioning of the RV, causing ischaemia and right ventricular failure (RVF). As RVF progresses, a pronounced tricuspid regurgitation further decreases cardiac output and worsens organ congestion. This can degenerate into an irreversible vicious cycle.

The effective diagnosis of RVF is optimally performed by a combination of techniques including echocardiography and catheterisation, which can also be used to monitor treatment efficacy. Treatment of RVF focuses on alleviating congestion, improving right ventricular contractility and right coronary artery perfusion and reducing right ventricular afterload. As part of the treatment, inhaled nitric oxide or prostacyclin effectively reduces afterload by

vasodilating the pulmonary vasculature. Traditional positive inotropic drugs enhance contractility by increasing the intracellular calcium concentration and oxygen consumption of cardiac myocytes, while vasoconstrictors such as norepinephrine increase arterial blood pressure, which improves cardiac perfusion but increases afterload. A new treatment, the calcium sensitiser, levosimendan, increases cardiac contractility without increasing myocardial oxygen demand, while preserving myocardial relaxation. Furthermore, it increases coronary perfusion and decreases afterload. Conversely, traditional treatments of circulatory failure, such as mechanical ventilation and volume loading, could be harmful in the case of RVF. This review outlines the pathophysiology, diagnosis and treatment of RVF, illustrated with clinical case studies.

**Keywords** Heart failure · Levosimendan · Vasodilator agents · Inotropic agents · Pathophysiology · Pharmacology

### Introduction

Until fairly recently, right ventricular failure (RVF) was a relatively neglected medical condition. The right ventricle (RV) was considered as a moderately passive conduit between the systemic and pulmonary circulations. This belief was supported by studies showing that complete destruction of the right ventricular free wall in

dogs had no detectable impairment on overall cardiac performance [1]. However, investigations in the 1970s demonstrated that RVF has significant haemodynamic and cardiac performance effects, as illustrated by Cohen et al. in six patients following a myocardial infarction involving the RV [2]. The patients had severe hypotension, diminished peripheral perfusion and severely impaired pressure generation in the RV, with almost no

pressure gradient from the right atrium to the pulmonary artery [2].

Precipitating factors for RVF are common in surgical and medical intensive care units (ICUs). These include increased pulmonary vascular resistance, such as after cardiac transplantation; acute respiratory distress syndrome; the presence of a left ventricular assist device; positive pressure mechanical ventilation and sepsis. There is also a higher incidence of RVF occurring in ICUs than is generally recognised.

Right ventricular failure has a similar incidence to left-sided heart failure, with each affecting about 1 in 20 of the population [3]. Left-sided heart failure is often a chronic, progressive disease with mortality four to eight times greater than that of the age-matched general population [4]. In contrast, the outcome of RVF is largely dependent on the underlying cause, resulting in either an acute or chronic condition. Patients in cardiogenic shock due to an infarction predominantly affecting either the left or right ventricle experience a similar rate of mortality, despite patients with RVF being younger and having a higher prevalence of single vessel disease [5]. Furthermore, ischaemia following a myocardial infarction involving both the right ventricle (RV) and the left, results in a greater risk of mortality than isolated left ventricular ischaemia [6, 7].

The pathophysiology, diagnosis and treatment of RVF in the ICU is associated with some controversy. This review provides an informed opinion on a number of these issues, the effects of some newer treatment options for RVF involving pulmonary vasodilation and enhancing cardiac contraction are described, and their therapeutic benefits are demonstrated in three case studies that are summarised here and described in full in the electronic supplementary material (ESM).

### **Physiology of the right ventricle and pathophysiology of right ventricular failure**

The primary function of the RV is to maintain a low right atrial pressure, optimising venous return and to provide sustained low-pressure perfusion through the lungs. To achieve this, the RV ejects blood quasi-continuously from the right atria to the lungs, continuously emptying the right atria. This ‘continuous’ ejection is possible because of the favourable characteristics of the pulmonary vascular bed, which is a low pressure, low resistance and high compliance circuit with a pressure gradient of 5 mmHg. Conversely, the left ventricle generates high-pressure pulsatile flow through arterial vessels with low compliance. The right cardiac and pulmonary pressures observed in a healthy spontaneously breathing adult are summarised in Table 1.

The RV is anatomically adapted for the generation of a sustained low-pressure perfusion. It comprises two an-

**Table 1** ‘Normal’ right atrial, right ventricular and pulmonary artery pressures for a spontaneously breathing patient

Variable	Value
Right atrial pressure	
Mean	0–7 mmHg
Right ventricular pressure	
Systolic	15–25 mmHg
Diastolic	0–8 mmHg
Pulmonary artery pressure	
Systolic	15–25 mmHg
Diastolic	8–15 mmHg
Mean	10–20 mmHg
Wedge	6–12 mmHg <sup>a</sup>
Pulmonary vascular resistance	100–250 dynes/s per cm <sup>5</sup>

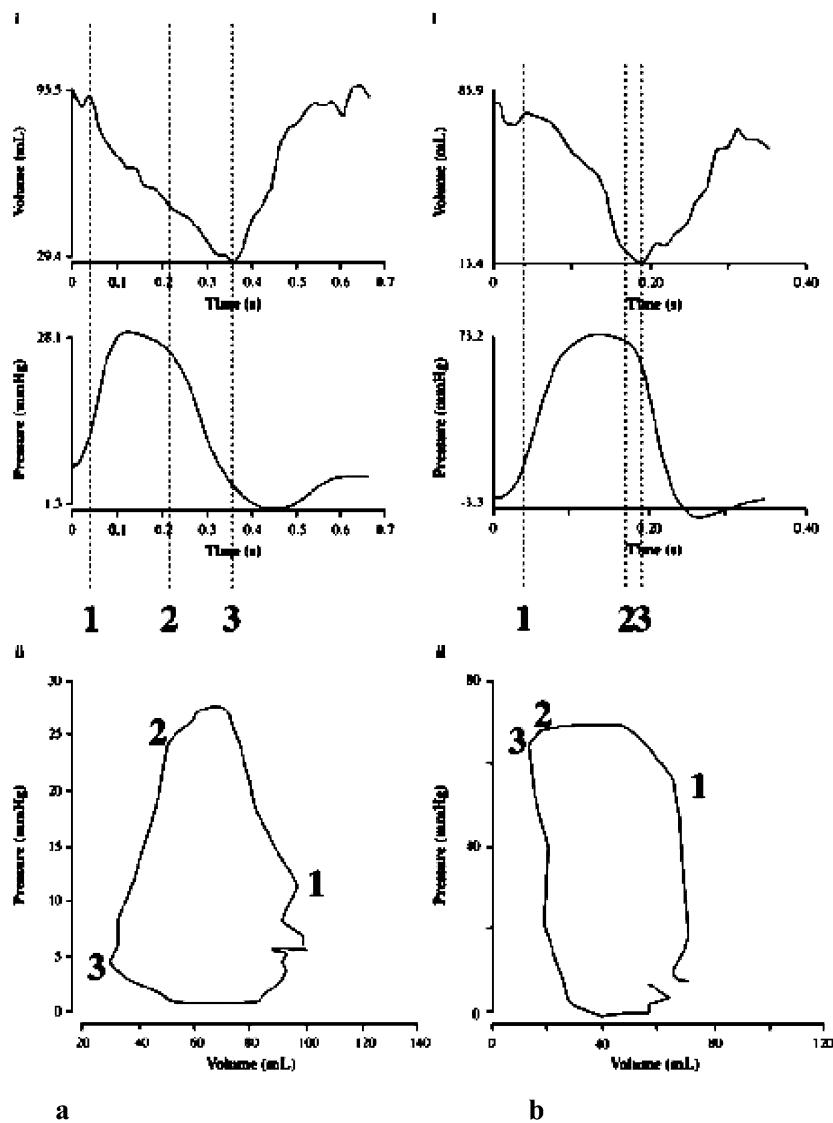
<sup>a</sup> Should be less than the pulmonary artery diastolic pressure

atomically and functionally different cavities, termed the sinus and the cone. The sinus generates pressure during systole and the cone regulates this pressure [8]. Right ventricular contraction occurs in three phases; contraction of the papillary muscles, then movement of the right ventricular free wall towards the inter-ventricular septum and, finally, contraction of the left ventricle causes a ‘wringing’ which further empties the RV. The net effect is pressure generation in the sinus with a peristaltic motion starting at the apex moving towards the cone and, due to the compliance of the upper cone region of the thin-walled RV, the peak pressure is reduced and prolonged. Therefore, ejection into the pulmonary circulation is sustained until the RV has completed its emptying, end-diastolic pressure is minimal and venous return is optimal. Notably, right ventricular preload is determined by both the compliance of the RV and the venous return. The latter depends on the pressure gradient from the periphery to the right atria and the venous resistance. Despite the thin muscular walls of the RV, it adapts to small changes in venous return, such as those occurring during respiration, without altering cavity pressures or volumes. However, larger changes in venous return affect the right ventricular end-diastolic volume.

### **Effect of an increase in right ventricular afterload: chronic pulmonary hypertension or acute cor pulmonale**

The pressure-volume characteristics for the RV differ markedly from those of the left ventricle (Fig. 1) [9]. The right ventricular pressure-volume loop has a more triangular shape compared with that of the left ventricle, with only brief periods of isovolaemic contraction and relaxation. There is sustained ejection during pressure development that, more importantly, continues during pressure decline. This prolonged low-pressure emptying

**Fig. 1** Pressure and volume changes against time during a contraction cycle (i) and the pressure-volume loop derived from these measurements (ii) are shown for a normal patient (a) and for a patient with pulmonary stenosis (b). The numbers indicate: 1, the opening of the pulmonary valve marking the start of the ejection phase; 2, the onset of relaxation; 3, the closing of the pulmonary valve marking the end of the ejection phase. In (a), the pressure-volume loop is more triangular than that of the left ventricle. Ejection from the right ventricle starts early during the pressure increase and the isovolaemic contraction phase is consequently not well defined. It is interesting to note that ejection continued after the peak pressure during pressure decline (between points 2 and 3). In (b), the pressure-volume loop resembles that of the left ventricle. There is a well defined end systolic shoulder and there is no ejection during the pressure decline ([a] reproduced from *British Heart Journal* 1988; volume 59, pages 23–30 with permission from BMJ Publishing Group [9]; [b] reproduced from *British Heart Journal* 1990; volume 63, pages 45–49, with permission from BMJ Publishing Group [10])



implies that right ventricular emptying is very sensitive to changes in afterload. Thus, in a patient with pulmonary hypertension, the right ventricular pressure-volume loop is not triangular and resembles that of the left ventricle (Fig. 1b) [10]. To compensate, the RV dilates to maintain the stroke volume, though the ejection fraction is reduced [11], and the peristaltic contraction is lost, causing an accelerated increase in pulmonary artery pressure and flow.

The increased afterload also prolongs the isovolaemic contraction phase and ejection time and, therefore, increases myocardial oxygen consumption. Under physiological conditions, there may be increased perfusion of the right coronary artery. However, partial occlusion of the right coronary artery may prevent this compensatory mechanism, resulting in ischaemia [12]. Therefore, in a patient with decreased right coronary artery perfusion, it

is important to reduce right ventricular afterload to improve the oxygen supply/demand ratio in the RV to maintain right ventricular function. (This is demonstrated in the first illustrative case study.)

The RV is predominantly perfused by the right coronary artery with supply of some regions by the left anterior descending branch of the left coronary artery. Physiologically, right coronary artery perfusion occurs during both diastole and systole, in contrast to the left coronary artery, that supplies the left ventricular muscle mostly during diastole. However, when pulmonary artery hypertension is present, right coronary artery perfusion occurs quasi-exclusively during diastole, potentially reducing the oxygen supply to the RV during increased oxygen demand.

Acute cor pulmonale relates to a sudden increase in afterload, most often due to a massive pulmonary embo-

lism or acute respiratory distress syndrome in adults [13, 14, 15, 16]. In either setting, right ventricular outflow impedance is suddenly increased, right ventricular ejection is impaired and the RV is enlarged. Thus, both systolic and diastolic function are impaired, which may cause or precipitate circulatory failure in critically ill patients. Acute cor pulmonale is reversible when the cause of increased afterload is removed.

### **Ventricular interdependence**

There is a high degree of ventricular interdependence due to the interaction of the inter-ventricular septum in the contraction of both ventricles, which is pronounced due to the existence of the pericardium [17]. The load on a ventricle is dependent on the passive filling of the contralateral ventricle [18]. The close association between the cardiac cavities can be seen in echocardiography images of the four chambers, such as those shown for the first and the third case studies (Fig. 3 and the ESM) and in recently published papers [14, 16]. Indeed, increases in the end-diastolic volume of the left ventricle are transmitted to the RV by movement of the inter-ventricular septum towards the right cavity, increasing the end-diastolic pressure of the RV [20]. Similarly, when the right ventricular end-diastolic volume is increased, the inter-ventricular septum shifts towards the left cavity during diastole due to the restrictions imposed by the pericardium on the RV as the cavity volume increases. This leftward shift impairs the function of the left ventricle due to the reduction in left ventricular volume, decreasing both left ventricular filling and compliance, manifested as increased muscle stiffness. Thus, in a canine model, ischaemia and acute dilatation of the RV decreased the compliance of the left ventricle, resulting in decreased cardiac output due to a leftward shift in the inter-ventricular septum, which was attenuated by the opening of the pericardium [21].

Ventricular interdependence can also cause RVF during left ventricular assist device support. As the left ventricular assist device unloads the left ventricle, the inter-ventricular septum is shifted left. This alters the right ventricular compliance decreasing force and rate of contraction together with a decreased afterload and increased preload. In a healthy heart, cardiac output may be maintained but, with pre-existing pathology, the decrease in contractility may result in RVF [22]. It is therefore crucial to support right ventricular function during the first days following insertion of a left ventricular assist device.

### **Vicious cycle of auto-aggravation**

Compared to the left ventricle, RVF progresses quickly from compensated to end-stage because of a vicious cycle

of auto-aggravation. This is unique to the RV and is not a consequence of isolated left ventricular failure. The elevated right atrial and ventricular end-diastolic pressures eventually lead to an increased right ventricular end-diastolic volume, insufficiency of the tricuspid valve and regurgitation. The tricuspid insufficiency aggravates hepatic and kidney congestion and decreases cardiac output; the heart is, therefore, unable to maintain an adequate function. Thus, the auto-aggravation becomes an irreversible vicious cycle. In addition, decreased venous return to the left ventricle reduces left ventricular preload. This further exacerbates the situation as it causes decreased left ventricular output and systemic blood pressure and hence further impairment of organ perfusion, including the coronary arteries. This ischaemia further diminishes cardiac function and the cycle of worsening output, congestion and ischaemia continues. Therefore, any sign of RVF should result in immediate treatment to avoid the start of the vicious cycle of auto-aggravation.

### **Diagnosis of right ventricular failure—identifying organ dysfunction**

Traditional non-specific approach

The diagnosis of acute RVF in patients in the ICU is complicated by the lack of clinical and biological specific signs. Some biological signs which may be indicative of cardiac dysfunction appear very early during acute RVF. The organs most affected by RVF-induced congestion are the liver and kidneys. Decreased perfusion of the kidneys is manifested as a reduction in both urine output and creatinine clearance. Decreased hepatic perfusion results in increased plasma lactate due to an impaired lactate clearance, a reduction in the synthesis of coagulation factors (observed as a decrease in prothrombin time) and hepatic cytolysis. Interestingly, Fig. 2 and Fig. S1 in the ESM show two examples of the effects of very severe liver and kidney congestion related to RVF.

The sensitivity of conventional chest X-ray techniques to identify changes in right ventricular form is limited by the unusual shape of the RV and the unpredictable manner in which it dilates. Inferential diagnosis may be possible by identification of other radiographic changes, such as the state of the pulmonary circulation and the position of the heart in the chest. Changes in the left ventricle may be apparent on chest X-ray, resulting from the decreased left ventricular preload that is a consequence of RVF.

### **Echocardiography**

Echocardiography is an alternative, more accessible technique for the diagnosis of RVF and for the intermit-

tent repetitive follow-up of the dynamics of therapeutic responses. Its advantage is that a qualitative conclusion can be reached instantaneously. When RVF is secondary to an increase in afterload, the isovolaemic contraction phase and ejection time are prolonged, and increases in pulmonary artery pressure and flow are accelerated. Echocardiography also provides information about the mechanisms of RVF, such as pericardial effusion with or without tamponade, tricuspid insufficiency, pulmonary emboli or right ventricular ischaemia and the resulting acute cor pulmonale [14].

Additionally, echocardiography enables the simultaneous evaluation of left ventricular function, a possible component of the RVF. Due to the geometry and location of the RV, the accuracy and necessity of determining exact right ventricular dimensions remains questionable and an experienced intensivist familiar with performing and evaluating echocardiography is essential. Although echocardiography can be repeated infinitely, the continuous flow of information provided by right heart catheterisation is difficult to reproduce and when technical or human limitations render echocardiography impossible, right heart catheterisation becomes the diagnostic tool of choice.

#### Pulmonary artery catheterisation

Catheterisation of the pulmonary artery is more invasive but useful to evaluate right ventricular function and confirm the presence of RVF in patients in the ICU. The Swan–Ganz catheter measures both mixed venous oxygen saturation and intravascular pressures or pressure changes in the RV as well as pulmonary artery pressure and pulmonary capillary wedge pressure. Despite difficulties in the interpretation of mean intravascular pressure values, the tracings showing changes in pressure and flow enable the assessment of the impact of treatment on right ventricular function. This cautious interpretation accounts for the almost constant reflux due to the tricuspid insufficiency, which can be observed by central venous and right atrial pressure changes (see Fig. 3 and the illustrative example described in the ESM). Such regurgitation could be used as a hallmark for RVF and as a marker for treatment efficacy.

A more advanced pulmonary catheter, equipped with a fast-response thermistor, is another valuable diagnostic tool enabling clinical assessment of right ventricular volume and haemodynamic parameters by thermodilution. It may also measure cardiac output more precisely even in the presence of tricuspid insufficiency, a particular problem during mechanical ventilation. Indeed, the more widespread introduction of thermodilution techniques to assess pump function has contributed to the recognition of the inherent pathology of RVF. Values for cardiac performance obtained from this technique compare favour-

ably with those using radionucleotides or two-dimensional echocardiography [24, 25].

If a central venous pressure or pulmonary artery catheter is in place, haemodynamic parameters that can aid in the diagnosis of RVF include an increase in right atrial pressure and a decrease in arterial blood pressure, cardiac output and mixed venous oxygen saturation, despite a usually preserved pulmonary artery pressure and pulmonary capillary wedge pressure. For difficult cases, a technique often cited in the literature for the diagnosis of RVF involves the administration of 250 ml of crystalloids or colloids over 10 min [26]. If the patient is suffering from RVF, all the above haemodynamic parameters worsen, including a dramatic increase in right atrial pressure with no change in cardiac output. This test should not be performed in patients who are in acute RVF, as there is a risk of severe aggravation of tricuspid insufficiency and organ congestion after volume loading (see below).

#### Management of right ventricular failure

The principal therapeutic goals of RVF depend on its underlying aetiology, but generally involve breaking the vicious cycle of reduced cardiac output by restoring adequate oxygen delivery to the myocardium and reducing right ventricular overload. Treatment usually focuses on alleviating congestion, improving right ventricular contractility and/or reducing right ventricular afterload.

When RVF is related to occlusion of the right coronary artery, reperfusion by coronary angioplasty may help restore contractile function to the ischaemic myocardium and improve the clinical outcome [27]. Revascularisation of the right coronary artery may also be prudent when inserting a left ventricular assist device in patients with right coronary artery-associated ischaemia, to avoid subsequent RVF [28]. Patients who have RVF related to atrial fibrillation may benefit from aggressive anti-arrhythmic treatment to improve cardiac output, and temporary pericardiotomy may benefit patients following sternotomy for cardiac surgery.

#### Volume management

Volume management is a difficult but important task in the treatment of RVF. In very few cases of RVF with normal pulmonary vascular resistance, volume loading may be useful in increasing preload, which increases right ventricular end-diastolic volume and cardiac output [29]. However in the large majority of RVF patients, this compensatory mechanism is potentially limited beyond a mean pulmonary artery pressure of 30 mmHg [30] and therefore caution is warranted when considering volume loading. Volume overload is common during RVF and

volume loading may further dilate the RV, increase tricuspid regurgitation and, consequently, worsen hepatic and renal congestion and RVF. A sharp rise in left- or right-sided filling pressures without a concomitant increase in cardiac output may indicate when further volume loading is detrimental.

In this scenario, fluid withdrawal should be started with diuretics and haemofiltration. If the RV is dilated and the inter-ventricular septum shifted, one should first try diuretics. If this is unsuccessful, haemofiltration is urgently recommended, often under inotropic support.

### Pulmonary vasodilators

#### *Systemic therapy*

In the presence of elevated pulmonary vascular resistances, vasodilator therapy may reduce right ventricular afterload. This will improve right ventricular function by decreasing right ventricular myocardial oxygen consumption and improving left ventricular filling, which will eventually increase systemic blood pressure and right coronary artery perfusion pressure. This will, in turn, decrease right atrial pressure and organ congestion. Thus, intravenous vasodilators such as nitroglycerin, nitroprusside or prostaglandin E1 may be beneficial in patients with isolated RVF [31, 32]. However, systemic pulmonary vasodilators reverse hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction, worsening ventilation-perfusion matching within the lung and decreasing arterial oxygen saturation. Also, they decrease diastolic pressure, resulting in decreased right coronary artery perfusion, which worsens ischaemia [33, 34].

#### *Inhaled therapies*

Inhalational vasodilatory agents, such as prostacyclin or its analogues and nitric oxide (NO), have a direct, selective effect on the pulmonary vasculature [23, 35, 36, 37]. NO diffuses into the pulmonary vascular smooth muscle cells, causing vasodilation, and its effects are localised as it rapidly binds to plasma proteins and haemoglobin. Following prolonged administration, rebound pulmonary hypertension has been frequently reported when NO inhalation is suddenly withdrawn [38]. Despite its haemodynamic benefits, a survival advantage for patients with RVF who respond to NO therapy has not been proven [39]. Inhaled sodium nitroprusside, a NO donor drug, is a possible alternative for the future [40].

Beneficial effects of inhaled NO have also been described in the management of RVF associated with a patent foramen ovale. As a patent foramen ovale, together with right-left shunt, is frequently found in patients who have RVF with elevated right atrial pressures, its

role in maintaining (or restoring) left ventricular preload, albeit by simultaneously compromising arterial oxygenation, cannot be ignored [41, 42].

An alternative to inhaled NO is inhaled prostacyclin (= prostaglandin I<sub>2</sub>). Besides its vasodilator properties, inhaled prostacyclin is the most potent platelet aggregation inhibitor known. Prostacyclin also stimulates endothelial release of NO, and vice versa. A potentially substantial advantage of inhaled, versus intravenous, prostacyclin is that rebound pulmonary hypertension after abrupt discontinuation has so far not been reported. This suggests that, in comparison with inhaled NO, inhaled prostacyclin may treat pulmonary hypertension more effectively. Prostacyclin has no known toxic effects or active metabolites and it is cheaper than NO, both in terms of the equipment necessary for its administration and the substance itself [43, 44].

Iloprost is the stable carbacyclin derivative of prostacyclin. It has several advantageous properties compared to prostacyclin, including saline solubility, lower viscosity and a significantly longer duration of action with a half-life of 20–30 min and haemodynamic effects that last for 1 h [45].

#### Contractility enhancing agents

The right ventricular ejection can be directly increased by the insertion of a right ventricular assist device, which may be beneficial for the short-term prophylaxis in patients following cardiac surgery or transplantation, enabling the stunned heart to recover [46].

Positive inotropic agents are also commonly used to improve right ventricular function. Left ventricular contraction assists the ejection from the RV; therefore, inotropic drugs that increase the contraction of the whole heart will improve right ventricular function both by directly enhancing right-sided contractility and by their effects on the entire myocardium. Positive inotropic agents— $\beta$ -adrenoceptor agonists and phosphodiesterase inhibitors—enhance myocardial contractility by increasing the intracellular calcium concentration in both ventricles due to their actions on cAMP [47]. In the treatment of chronic heart failure patients, vasoactive  $\beta$ -agonists produce a net increase in cardiac output providing a short-term benefit, but the increased contractility, working against a greater afterload, increases the workload of the heart, resulting in an increase in energy utilisation. Therefore, the oxygen consumption of the myocardium is increased without increasing oxygen supply, which may cause or worsen ischaemia and arrhythmias. Thus, the use of some of these agents has been associated with an increase in long-term mortality [48, 49, 50] and, in the case of dobutamine, tolerance develops after a short time [51]. The treatment of RVF is comparatively short and repeated dosing less common than for chronic heart

failure, therefore tolerance may not be relevant in this setting. However, the effects of sympathomimetics on long-term outcome should perhaps be considered when selecting appropriate treatment for RVF.

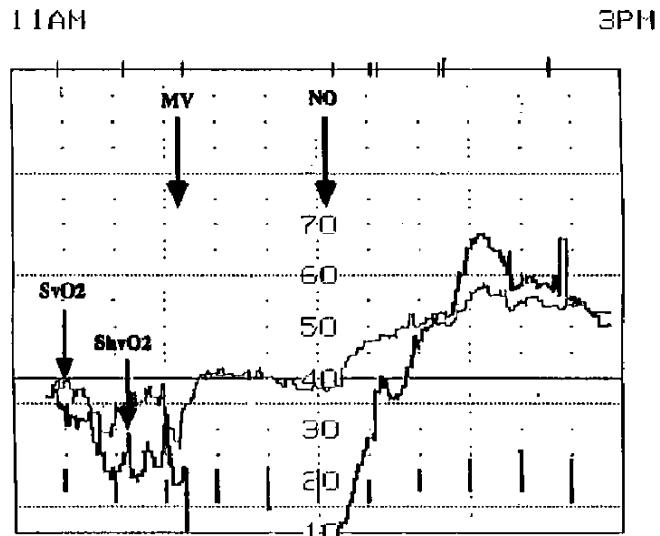
A newer class of drugs, the calcium sensitizers, also improve cardiac function by increasing the contraction of the myocardium, but without significantly increasing intracellular calcium levels. Levosimendan, the first calcium sensitizer in clinical use, increases the sensitivity of the cardiac myofilaments to calcium during systole without affecting diastole. The increased calcium sensitivity increases the force and rate of contraction of the myocardium. Moreover, as it only increases systolic calcium sensitivity, it does not affect the relaxation kinetics, in contrast to the traditional inotropic drugs. Hence, levosimendan has no adverse effects on diastolic function [52] and is not associated with a significant increase in myocardial oxygen consumption in patients with chronic heart failure [53], though this result remains to be confirmed.

Levosimendan also induces dilatation of the pulmonary, systemic and coronary vasculature by activation of ATP-sensitive potassium channels resulting in a decreased systemic and pulmonary vascular resistance [54, 55]. This may cause under-perfusion of the myocardium, but the dilation of the coronary arteries results in improved myocardial blood flow [53]. Levosimendan improved haemodynamic performance and decreased the risk of worsening heart failure and mortality in different heart failure populations, compared with dobutamine or placebo [56, 57]. Indeed, all the evidence described comes from studies in patients with chronic heart failure, and the direct effects of levosimendan on RVF are currently unproven. However, from its known effects, including a demonstrated improvement in right ventricular contractile efficiency [53], beneficial effects in RVF may also be expected. The haemodynamic effects of levosimendan may be sustained for days, or even weeks, due to an active metabolite with a half-life of over 3 days [58].

### Vasopressors

Vasopressors directly increase arterial blood pressure and improve coronary artery perfusion, though also increasing afterload. Their benefits in RVF were pioneered by Prewitt and co-workers and they may be critical in the treatment of RVF, preventing the vicious cycle by improving right coronary artery perfusion and right ventricular contraction [59, 60]. Norepinephrine, a potent

-adrenergic-agonist is recommended to improve right coronary artery perfusion pressure and right ventricular function, and it is more effective than phenylephrine, another selective -adrenergic agonist [61]. In patients with septic shock, norepinephrine increased mean arteri-

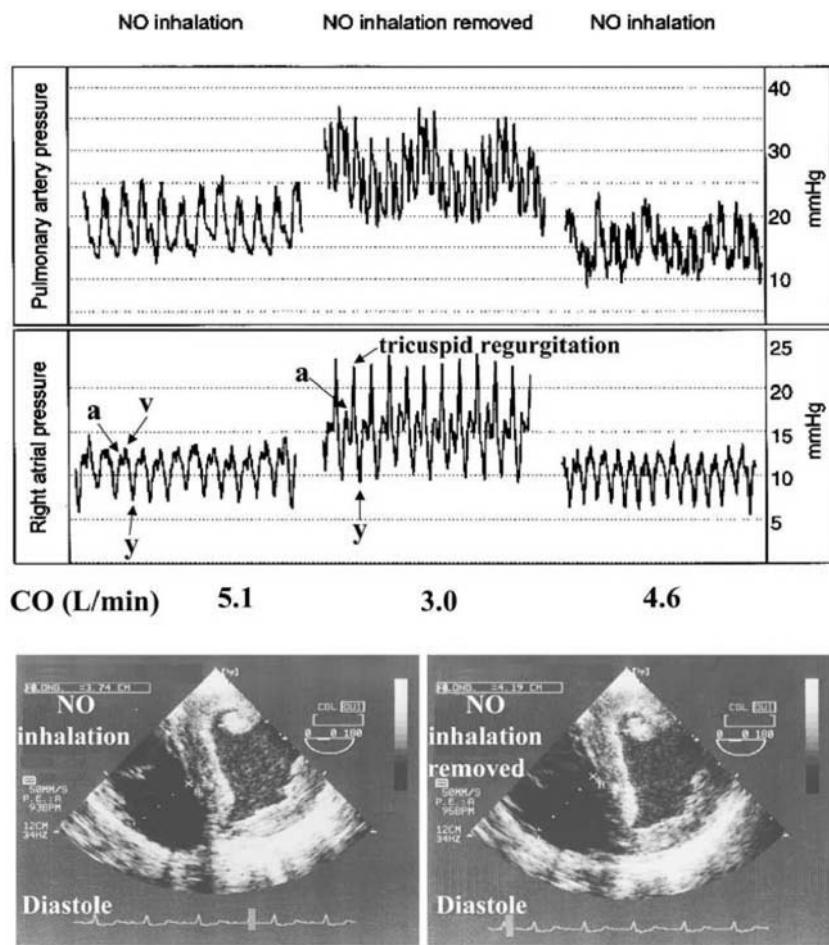


**Fig. 2** Mixed venous oxygen saturation ( $SvO_2$ ) increases and hepatic venous oxygen saturation ( $ShvO_2$ ) decreases in response to the start of mechanical ventilation in a patient with predominantly right-sided congestive heart failure due to increased preload that worsens right ventricular function and hence organ congestion. Following nitric oxide inhalation,  $ShvO_2$  increases indicating improved right ventricular function due to decreased preload and relieved liver congestion. MV start of mechanical ventilation, NO start of nitric oxide inhalation (18 ppm) (reproduced from Gatecl et al., 1995, with permission [23])

al pressure, with a moderate increase in mean pulmonary artery pressure, improving right coronary artery perfusion pressure and right ventricular contraction [60]. However, in the case report of sepsis-induced RVF (see below), norepinephrine increased organ perfusion pressure but not cardiac output, and combination with inhaled NO was therefore needed.

### Mechanical ventilation

Mechanical ventilation is the usual treatment for shock, however it may worsen RVF as elevated transpulmonary pressures increase right ventricular output impedance and, hence, decrease stroke output. An example of severe hepatic and renal congestion due to subacute RVF markedly aggravated by mechanical ventilation is shown in Fig. 2 [23]. The patient had a low hepatic venous oxygen saturation caused by a high hepatic venous back-pressure that was reducing liver blood flow despite a maintained cardiac output. Due to respiratory fatigue, the patient was mechanically ventilated, which resulted in an improved mixed venous oxygen saturation, from 28 to 40%, related to the decreased respiratory work and, thus, systemic oxygen consumption. However, mechanical ventilation caused an abrupt decrease in hepatic venous oxygen saturation to an undetectable



**Fig. 3** Patient haemodynamics with and without inhaled nitric oxide (NO). Inhaled NO withdrawal in this patient with ischaemia-induced right ventricular failure increased mean pulmonary artery pressure from 18 to 25 mmHg. During NO inhalation and preserved right ventricular function, right atrial pressure showed 'a' waves (auricular contraction) followed by 'v' waves (passive atrial filling due to venous return) and 'y' waves (beginning of diastole; rapid ventricular filling and passive atrial emptying). When inhaled NO was removed, although pulmonary artery pressure remained in the normal range, the slight increase resulted in a deterioration of right ventricular function and dilation of the right ventricle. Right atrial pressure showed that a tricuspid insufficiency emerged (positive waves) that worsened cardiac output (CO) despite the increase in auricular contraction (increase in 'a' waves). Echocardiography shows the close association between the left and right ventricles separated by the inter-ventricular septum. An enlargement of the right ventricle can be seen, with the end-diastolic diameter increasing from 37 mm to 42 mm when NO inhalation was removed (Reproduced from 2002 Yearbook of Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine, Acute right ventricular failure: physiology and therapy by Renaud E, Karpati P, Mebazaa A, page 211, Fig. 1, and page 212, Fig. 2, 2002, Springer-Verlag, with permission [19])

level, which resulted from worsening RVF related to an increased right ventricular afterload due to positive pressure breathing. Consequently, right atrial pressure was raised, worsening the hepatic congestion. The sub-

sequent use of NO inhalation decreased right ventricular afterload, improved right ventricular function and relieved liver congestion, demonstrated by the rapid increase in hepatic venous oxygen saturation as RVF was successfully controlled.

In summary, although several tools could be used to improve RVF, volume loading and mechanical ventilation should be used with caution because they may precipitate or aggravate RVF.

### Illustrative case studies

The treatment of RVF often requires a multi-modal approach with continuous haemodynamic monitoring to observe the patient's progress. Three case studies are summarised below (and described in detail in the ESM) that highlight the diagnosis and treatment of acute RVF with therapy tailored specifically to the patient's diagnosis and haemodynamic status. These cases demonstrate that there are a number of treatment approaches that may result in a successful outcome. The new myocardial contractility-enhancing agents may obviate the use of some agents with a questionable long-term benefit.

**Table 2** The treatment of sepsis-induced right ventricular failure with 'traditional' positive inotropic agents: the value of each parameter before and after the corresponding treatment (*DO* dobutamine, *NE* norepinephrine, *NO* inhaled nitric oxide, *VL* volume loading: 250 ml of colloids) had been given

Time	14:00 VL	15:30 VL	16:30 NE	20:30 DO/NO	23:30
HR (bpm)	90	90	90	94	92
BP (mmHg)	96/56	95/49	110/55	130/70	115/68
PAP (mmHg)	35/24	42/28	43/30	46/32	31/21
RAP (mmHg)	12	13	20	16	8
PCWP (mmHg)	12	12	14	15	10
SvO <sub>2</sub> (%)	70	71	65	63	74
CI (l/min per m <sup>2</sup> )	2.3	2.3	2.0	1.9	2.8
Lactate (mmol/l)	3.3	3.6	3.8	4.0	4.1

*HR* heart rate, *BP* arterial blood pressure, *PAP* pulmonary artery pressure, *RAP* right atrial pressure, *PCWP* pulmonary capillary wedge pressure, *SvO<sub>2</sub>* mixed venous oxygen saturation, *CI* cardiac index

#### Effects of inhaled nitric oxide on ischaemia-related right ventricular failure following cardiac surgery

A 30-year-old male with acute RVF was treated with inhaled NO, 8 ppm, to reduce the afterload, which rapidly restored haemodynamics. When NO was withdrawn, right atrial pressure increased, cardiac output and arterial blood pressure dropped, there was tricuspid regurgitation and echocardiography showed a severe dilation of the RV (Fig. 3). NO was restored and the patient was weaned from treatment on the 7th postoperative day.

#### Sepsis-induced right ventricular failure treated with the combination of traditional positive inotropic agents and inhaled nitric oxide

A 55-year-old male had sepsis-induced myocardial dysfunction with a predominant RVF confirmed by echocardiography. Norepinephrine increased blood pressure but could not improve right ventricular function. The patient was subsequently treated with dobutamine, 5 g/kg per min, and inhaled NO, 5 ppm (Table 2). The combination induced a large, rapid and sustained decrease in right atrial pressure, pulmonary capillary wedge pressure was restored, mixed venous oxygen saturation and cardiac index were approaching normal values. A volume loading of 250 ml was given to improve organ perfusion pressure and subsequently the patient was haemodynamically stable and all parameters returned to values towards or within the normal range.

#### Ischaemia-induced right ventricular failure treated with calcium sensitiser monotherapy

Following coronary artery bypass graft surgery, a 71-year-old male was diagnosed with RVF and treated with levosimendan, 6 g/kg loading dose given over 10 min followed by a 0.1 g/kg per min infusion for 24 h. Four hours after the start of the levosimendan infusion, echocardiography

showed an improvement in cardiac performance. At 24 h, echocardiography and haemodynamic values were almost restored to normal and the patient reported symptomatic improvement (echocardiography video available in the ESM). This improvement in right ventricular function was related to an improvement in right ventricular contractility and vasodilatory effects on the pulmonary circulation (decrease in pulmonary artery pressure).

#### Conclusion

It is now evident that the RV plays a pivotal role in haemodynamic homeostasis, and changes in right ventricular function can have profound effects on the pulmonary and systemic circulation. Therefore, it is important that RVF is diagnosed quickly and accurately before it degenerates into the vicious cycle of auto-aggravation with tricuspid deficiency, worsening cardiac ischaemia and multiple organ congestion. Diagnosis should include an assessment of the patient and the use of diagnostic tools that also enable the clinician to follow the progress of treatment.

The management of RVF should focus on restoring right ventricular function with the treatment dictated by the underlying aetiology. The primary cause of RVF should be corrected wherever possible. The right ventricular afterload should be reduced, if necessary, by decreasing the pulmonary artery pressure (e.g. by administering pulmonary vasodilators such as inhaled NO or prostacyclin) and limiting plateau pressure in mechanically ventilated patients, the preload should be increased cautiously with volume loading and an adequate right coronary artery perfusion maintained. Positive inotropic agents have an important role in the treatment of RVF by improving cardiac output and coronary perfusion. However, traditional inotropic drugs increase myocardial contractility by their sympathomimetic action at the expense of increasing myocardial intracellular calcium concentration and oxygen consumption. Calcium sensitizers, specifically levosimendan, enhance contractility without increasing

myocardial oxygen consumption. If the beneficial effects that have been observed in chronic heart failure patients are validated in RVF in clinical studies, this class of agents may represent a valuable addition to the clinician's armamentarium for the management of this condition.

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## Red blood cell rheology in sepsis

**Abstract** Changes in red blood cell (RBC) function can contribute to alterations in microcirculatory blood flow and cellular dysoxia in sepsis. Decreases in RBC and neutrophil deformability impair the passage of these cells through the microcirculation. While the role of leukocytes has been the focus of many studies in sepsis, the role of erythrocyte rheological alterations in this syndrome has only recently been investigated. RBC rheology can be influenced by many factors, including alterations in intracellular calcium and adenosine triphosphate (ATP) concentrations, the effects of nitric oxide, a decrease in some RBC

membrane components such as sialic acid, and an increase in others such as 2,3 diphosphoglycerate. Other factors include interactions with white blood cells and their products (reactive oxygen species), or the effects of temperature variations. Understanding the mechanisms of altered RBC rheology in sepsis, and the effects on blood flow and oxygen transport, may lead to improved patient management and reductions in morbidity and mortality.

**Keywords** Erythrocyte · Deformability · Nitric oxide · Sialic acid · Multiple organ failure · Oxygen transport

### Introduction

Severe sepsis and septic shock are the commonest causes of death in intensive care units (ICUs), with associated mortality rates of 30–50% [1]. Sepsis is a complex pathophysiological process that involves both alterations in the microcirculation and changes in the biochemical and physiological characteristics of the blood constituents. Microvascular damage plays a crucial role in the impairment of tissue oxygenation that can contribute to multiple organ failure and death [2].

Microcirculatory alterations include slowing of capillary blood flow as a result of decreased perfusion pressure and local arteriolar constriction [2, 3], viscosity alterations [4, 5], and disturbances of red (RBC) and white (WBC) blood cell rheology [6, 7].

Some recent studies [8, 9, 10] have also defined the RBC as a possible oxygen sensor and regulator of vascular tone, opening new perspectives into the pathophysiol-

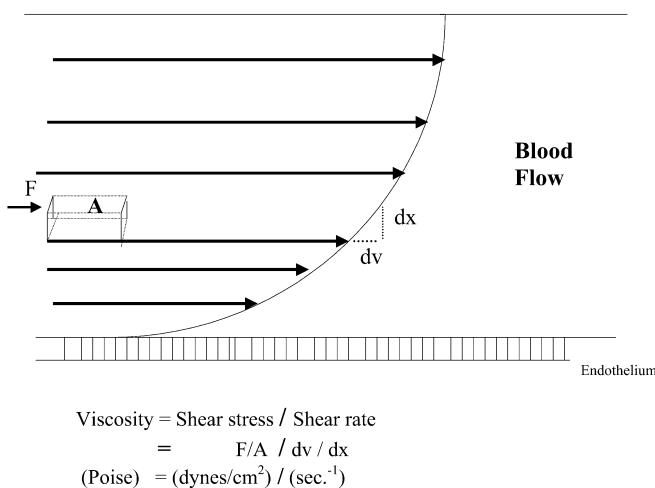
ogy of microcirculatory alterations and, perhaps, the treatment of sepsis.

This review evaluates alterations occurring in RBC rheology during sepsis and possible underlying mechanisms. The potential implications of blood transfusion and erythropoietin administration in sepsis will not be discussed.

### Major determinants of RBC rheology

#### Viscosity

Haemorheology is the study of deformation and flow of blood and blood cells. The prime function of blood is transport by flow, and the most important rheological property of blood is its resistance to flow, or viscosity. The definition of viscosity is explained in Fig. 1. Plasma viscosity is about 1.6 times that of water (normal range 1.15–1.35 mPa/s). Blood is a non-Newtonian fluid and



**Fig. 1** Blood viscosity. Schematic representation of a vessel lumen. The curved line represents the flow velocity profile in laminar flow. The viscosity (unit: Poise) is expressed as a ratio of shear stress to shear rate, where the shear stress (unit: dynes/cm<sup>2</sup>) is the force (*F*) parallel to the direction of flow per unit area of fluid sheared (*A*), and the shear rate (unit: second<sup>-1</sup>) is the velocity gradient between adjacent layers in laminar flow. [*dv* velocity difference of adjacent fluid laminae, *dx* distance between the fluid laminae (adapted from [5], with permission)]

its viscosity is therefore variable at any given temperature, depending on the shear rate. Haematocrit has a large effect on blood viscosity and blood flow. For example, hyperviscosity syndromes, such as polycythaemia, are associated with profound perfusion problems [11]; in contrast, anaemia favours an increase in cardiac output. In physiological conditions, changes in blood viscosity do not have a pronounced effect on blood flow. However, in low flow states, a reduction in shear rate will cause an increase in viscosity. Blood viscosity, therefore, has the potential to reduce flow under low flow, low shear conditions [3, 4, 5].

When RBCs are added to plasma, blood viscosity increases logarithmically with a linear increase in haematocrit over the range 20–60%. At high shear rates, bulk blood viscosity is low because RBC aggregates are dispersed and deformed into ellipsoids, oriented in parallel with flow streamlines, and with the membrane sliding around its cytoplasm. As shear rates are reduced, blood viscosity rises exponentially. In low flow states, when the shear stress acting on the cell is reduced, the RBC is less deformed; furthermore, the RBCs aggregate to form rouleaux, increasing blood viscosity. In the normal circulation the shear stress is generally sufficient to disperse the rouleaux, allowing RBC deformation and facilitating blood flow [3, 4, 5]. Therefore, the major determinants of whole blood viscosity are shear rate, plasma viscosity, haematocrit, RBC deformability, and RBC aggregation.

It is possible to measure plasma and whole blood viscosity over a wide range of shear rates in a variety of

viscometers. Serum viscosity (i.e., plasma viscosity less the effect of fibrinogen) and whole blood viscosity can be measured.

### Aggregation

At low shear rates, blood evolves from a low viscosity emulsion to a high viscosity suspension. The electrostatic repulsion of RBC is overcome by the presence of macromolecules which aggregate the cells. In inflammatory states, acute phase proteins (especially fibrinogen and large serum proteins such as  $\alpha_2$  macroglobulin) increase RBC aggregation. Rouleaux of cells bind together in a side-by-side fashion and, together with the continuous uptake of individual cells, networks of larger aggregates are formed.

RBC aggregation is reversible by shear forces. At shear rates of 7–10 s<sup>-1</sup>, the aggregates in normal blood are dispersed, cells become orientated with flow streamlines, and blood viscosity is reduced as the shear rates increase further. *In vitro*, this process of aggregation and disaggregation can continue for hours.

In addition to the plasma protein pattern, RBC aggregation is primarily determined by cellular properties; reduction in cell size increases aggregation as does RBC ageing. The haematocrit shows a biphasic effect on red cell aggregation, with a peak effect at around 40–45%.

Conditions of low shear rate *in vivo* are found primarily in the post-capillary venules. An increase in RBC aggregation would increase blood viscosity at this level [12]. The increased viscosity may promote blood stasis, which may induce local hypoxia and endothelial damage.

There are several methods of estimating RBC aggregation other than low shear rate viscometry, for example, erythrocyte sedimentation rate and direct microscopic observation of aggregation. Microscopic techniques with image analysis have also been developed [13], but the most widely used technique is the light scattering analysis of RBC suspensions that employs light transmission through a RBC suspension to obtain indices of RBC aggregation. This is expressed mainly as the average aggregate size at a certain shear stress.

### Deformability

'Cellular deformability' is the term generally used to characterize the RBC's ability to undergo deformation during flow [14]. The deformation response of a RBC to fluid forces is a complex phenomenon that depends on a number of different cell characteristics including membrane material properties [15], cell geometry, and cytoplasmic viscosity [16].

As measures of cellular deformability are dependent on the technique used, quoted values are not comparable.

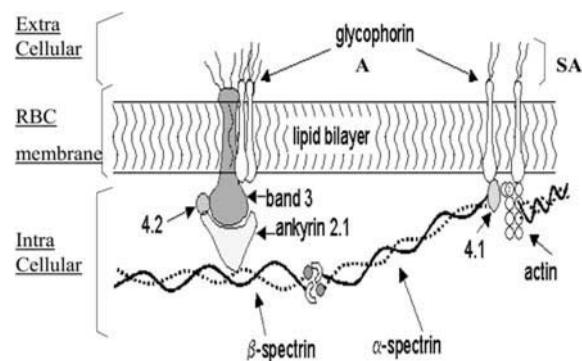
Methods to measure cellular deformability have been described in detail elsewhere [17, 18]. Briefly, micropipette aspiration provides the most detailed characterization of membrane properties. Single RBCs are aspirated into micropipettes with diameters in the range 1–2  $\mu\text{m}$ ; the relationship between the applied negative pressure and the membrane tongue extension is then quantitated. Using ektacytometry, RBCs are subjected to a laminar shear stress field in a cuvette viscometer; the resultant change in cell shape is continuously monitored by laser diffractometry. Unstressed discoid cells generate a circular diffraction pattern. By measuring optical densities at two points along the major and minor axes of the elliptical diffraction pattern, a parameter termed “deformability index” is generated which is a direct measure of cell ellipticity. A numerical value of zero corresponds to non-deformable cells, while increasingly positive values correspond to increasing cellular deformability. The membrane fragmentation assay using the ektacytometer is particularly useful for documenting decreased mechanical integrity of the membrane due to protein defects.

Micropore filtration is limited by the possible occlusion of the filter pores by WBCs [6]. This technique has been replaced by the cell transit analyzer (CTA) as it is insensitive to the presence of WBCs while the passage of individual RBCs are monitored by a computerized system.

Flow cytometry techniques can also be used to appreciate RBC shape, and to study the effect of modifications of osmolality on shape in critically ill patients [19, 20]. The advantage of this technique is that it can provide an easier and more rapid estimation of erythrocyte shape.

### RBC Membrane physiology

To undertake oxygen delivery, the RBC must be able to undergo considerable cellular deformation since its diameter (8  $\mu\text{m}$  in humans) far exceeds that of the capillaries (2–3  $\mu\text{m}$ ) through which it must pass [14]. The RBC membrane is composed of proteins (52% in weight), lipids (40%), and carbohydrates (8%). Membrane elasticity depends on the structural interactions between the outer plasma membrane and the underlying protein skeleton. The proteins of the RBC membrane are divided into two groups: integral and peripheral (Fig. 2). Integral proteins (glycophorin and Band 3 proteins) are tightly bound to the membrane through hydrophobic interactions with lipids in the bilayer [14, 15, 16]. A filamentous network of proteins is anchored to the bilayer by the integral proteins. This network has three principal components: spectrin, actin, and protein 4.1. The peripheral membrane proteins are located on the cytoplasmic surface of the lipid bilayer and can be readily released from the membrane by simple manipulation of the ionic strength of the milieu or variation in the concentrations of other proteins [14].



**Fig. 2** RBC membrane. Schematic representation of protein orientations in the human RBC. The membrane is composed of a phospholipid membrane bilayer and transmembrane proteins including glycophorin A and Band 3 proteins. Glycophorin A is the major sialoglycoprotein of the RBC. SA bound to glycophorin A is responsible for the negative charge of the RBC membrane. The intracellular compartment (IC) is constituted by spectrin ( $\beta$ - and  $\alpha$ -subunits), actin, protein 4.1, protein 4.2, and ankyrin

Reversible deformation of the RBC membrane occurs with a change in geometric shape without any change in surface area. With increased deformation, some of the spectrin molecules can attain their maximal linear extension, reaching the limit of reversible deformability [14].

The most abundant and best-studied integral protein of the RBC membrane is glycophorin A. This protein is highly glycosylated, with approximately 60% of its weight being carbohydrate, mostly in the form of 15 O-glycosidically linked tetrasaccharides. The two sialic acid residues (N-acetyl-neurameric acid; SA) account for the negative electrostatic force on the RBC membrane [14, 15, 16], a necessary feature of the cell's repellent properties. The importance of SA to RBC shape is demonstrated by the observation that neuraminidase-treated cells, which release their membrane SA content, undergo increased aggregation and have a reduced mean curvature [21].

### Alterations in microcirculation and blood rheology in sepsis

Sepsis induces profound changes in the microcirculation [2] with loss of capillary density [22], maldistribution of blood flow, increased flow heterogeneity [23], changes in microvascular reactivity [24], and WBC-endothelial cell adhesion and vascular leakage [2].

Microcirculatory dysfunction may be further aggravated by alterations in blood rheology resulting from decreased RBC [2, 6, 12, 25, 26, 27] and WBC deformability [2, 7], RBC aggregation [28, 29] and coagulation disturbances [30]. Interactions with WBCs cause release of oxygen free radicals, stimulating RBC intracellular proteolysis, membrane lipid peroxidation, and nitric oxide

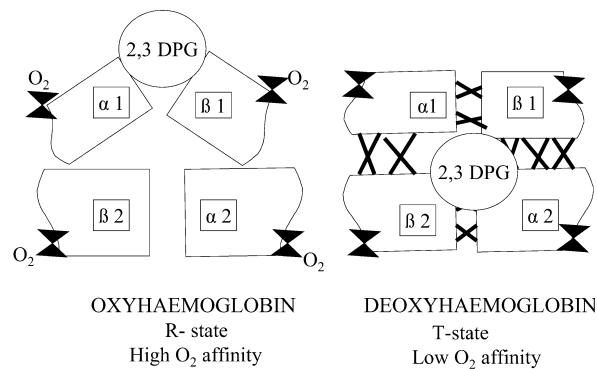
(NO) production. Alterations in RBC membrane (decreased carbohydrate content, alterations of membrane pumps) with increased free calcium concentrations, decreased ATP reserve, and modifications of 2,3 diphosphoglycerate (DPG) concentrations have also been described. Simchon et al. [31] noted that a reduction in RBC deformability in rats led to RBC entrapment in the microcirculation of specific regions (spleen, lung, liver, and femur). This resulted in a reduction in regional blood flow proportional to the number of trapped RBCs.

The role of RBC rheological alterations in sepsis has been investigated relatively recently. Several studies in animals and patients with sepsis have demonstrated decreased RBC deformability, increased aggregation and adhesiveness between WBCs, platelets, and endothelial cells [6, 25, 27, 29, 32]. Moreover, alterations in RBC deformability have been described as an early indicator of infection in trauma patients [33], and as a prognostic factor in canine septic shock [34].

### Mechanisms underlying alterations in RBC deformability during sepsis

#### 2,3 diphosphoglycerate (2,3 DPG)

2,3 DPG is one of the most important organic phosphates in the RBC (Fig. 3) as it increases oxygen delivery to the tissues by decreasing the interaction between oxygen and haemoglobin. Hypoxaemia stimulates 2,3 DPG production. Han and colleagues [35] reported an increase in 2,3 DPG in critically ill children, even in the absence of hypoxaemia. This may represent a possible response to illness with increased oxygen unloading to the tissues. However, increased 2,3 DPG can also decrease RBC deformability. Suzuki et al. [36] reported that increasing the 2,3-DPG concentration (by incubating human RBCs with inosine and pyruvate) increased intracellular haemoglobin concentrations (MCHC) and ATP content, and decreased intracellular pH. The deformability of 2,3-DPG-enriched RBC was greatly improved when the MCHC (and thus the internal viscosity) was normalized by suspension in a hypotonic solution, but not when the intracellular pH was altered from 6.5 to 7.5, or when the ATP concentration was adjusted by incubation with various concentrations of adenine, inosine, and glucose (0.6–2.1 mM/cells). Hence, decreased RBC deformability is due in part to the increase in internal viscosity, and in part to the increase in membrane viscoelasticity [36].



**Fig. 3** Role of 2,3 diphosphoglycerate. Diagrammatic representation of the subunit interaction in haemoglobin as  $O_2$  is added. Deoxyhaemoglobin (right), with low  $O_2$  affinity, is in the T-state, constrained by salt bridges (black crosses) and 2,3 DPG. As  $O_2$  is added in haem (black double triangles), the salt bridges are broken (black dots), and the 2,3 DPG molecule is expelled, resulting in the R configuration with higher  $O_2$  affinity. As 2,3 DPG lowers the affinity of haemoglobin toward  $O_2$ ,  $O_2$  transfer from blood to tissues is increased

Nitric oxide (NO)

#### RBC and modulation of vascular tone via NO

NO is produced by endothelial cells from L-arginine by constitutive (cNOS) or inducible (iNOS) synthase. In physiological conditions, cNOS plays an essential role in producing small amounts of NO, thus maintaining capillary patency. In sepsis, lipopolysaccharide (LPS) and cytokines such as tumour necrosis factor (TNF) and interferon- $\gamma$  (INF- $\gamma$ ) induce iNOS, resulting in the production of much greater quantities of NO. By its action on vascular smooth muscle, NO causes vasodilatation and increased tissue blood flow, but may also lead to arterial hypotension [37]. In the lung, NO rapidly binds to haemoglobin (T-state, 'tense', low oxygen affinity state, partially nitrosylated), forming a relatively stable haemoglobin-NO complex (R-state, 'relaxed', high oxygen affinity state, ligand-bound). Oxyhaemoglobin (R-state) is thus converted to methaemoglobin and nitrate. NO is released by haemoglobin (R-state) in the peripheral circulation, resulting in opening of the microvasculature [38, 39]. Allosteric transition from the R- to the T-state is triggered by oxygen release in the pre-capillary resistance vessels, which is then followed by release of NO. In the lungs, after eliminating carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ) and  $H^+$ , haemoglobin (in the T-state) re-captures oxygen and NO and switches back to the R-state [38, 39].

Sprague and colleagues [40, 41] demonstrated this essential role of RBCs on NO release in isolated perfused rabbit lungs. Based on several observations, they showed that ATP is a key mediator for NO release as RBCs contain large amounts of ATP [42] that are released in response to physiological stimuli [8]. Moreover, ATP stim-

ulates endothelial NO synthesis [43], thereby reducing vascular resistance in isolated lungs; this is prevented by the NO synthase inhibitor NG-nitro-L-arginine methyl ester (L-NAME) [40].

In dogs, ATP is also a mediator of NO release. However, in response to mechanical deformation, dog RBCs release much less ATP than rabbit or human RBCs [41]. This may be related to the much lower ATP concentrations found in dog RBCs compared to rabbits and humans [44].

NO is also a modulator of the membrane properties of RBC although the exact mechanism involved is as yet unclear. By an effect on the membrane RBC  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -ATPase channel, NO may increase free intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and thus decrease RBC deformability. In blood samples from healthy volunteers, endotoxin induced a significant increase in both intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration (evaluated by a fluorescent membrane probe) and membrane viscosity (anisotropy, evaluated by fluorescence spectrophotometry) [45]. Addition of the NO synthase inhibitor N-monomethyl-arginine (NMA) had no effect in control conditions but prevented the changes induced by endotoxin, suggesting that NO plays a role in intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis and erythrocyte membrane deformability in sepsis.

#### RBCs as producers of NO

Several studies have indicated that RBCs have the capacity to synthesize NO under certain conditions [46, 47]. Jubelin et al. [48] suggested that the RBC possesses all the cellular machinery necessary to synthesize its own NO.

*Plasmodium falciparum*-infected human RBCs can also produce NO, probably by the activation of iNOS [47]. By this means, RBCs may modulate their membrane deformability and oxygen affinity, and perhaps also contribute to the inflammatory host response by reacting with reactive oxygen species (ROS).

#### Effect of NO on RBC deformability

Korbut and Gryglewski [49] noted that alterations in deformability of isolated rabbit RBCs depended on the WBC concentration; WBCs decreased RBC deformability when the WBC count was below  $1.2 \times 10^6$  cells/ml, while higher WBC counts abolished this effect. In the presence of a low WBC count, RBC deformability was increased by NO donors, such as sydnonimine (a metabolite of molsidomine; SIN-1) and sodium nitroprusside, but was reduced by the NO synthase inhibitor L-NAME. In endotoxaemic rats, these same authors [50] noted altered RBC deformability (as measured by shear stress laser diffractometry) associated with increased RBC mem-

brane fragility. L-NAME significantly decreased RBC deformability but did not influence fragility. However, L-NAME administration 10 min prior to endotoxin administration also improved endotoxin-induced fragility. This indicates that NO influences RBC deformability and membrane fragility in the first stages of sepsis, probably by stimulation of cNOS [50].

Bateman et al. [51] recently demonstrated that aminoguanidine, an inhibitor of iNOS, prevented the accumulation of NO within the RBC in a rat model of peritonitis, and also prevented the decrease in RBC deformability. Thus, NO may play a role in modulating the mechanical properties of the RBC in vivo. Whether this is a direct action, with NO interfering with cytoskeletal elements, or indirect, via some intermediate such as peroxynitrite oxidizing cellular proteins [52], is unknown.

#### RBC calcium ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ )

RBC membrane fluidity is dependent upon the maintenance of a normal intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration [53]. This is kept within a narrow range (20–30 nM), some 50,000-fold lower than the external free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration, by a membrane-associated ATPase pump mechanism. In human RBCs, as in most cell types, a rise in cytosolic free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  induces a rapid increase in the potassium permeability by activation of a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -activated  $\text{K}^+$  channel, resulting in membrane hyperpolarization [54].

Increased intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels in aged RBC may precipitate their removal from the circulation [53]. Sepsis-associated changes in the RBC membrane may alter pump binding sites, inhibit their function, and disrupt intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis [55]. Alterations in the RBC  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -ATPase pump in sepsis remain controversial. Todd and Mollitt [56] reported that intracellular (free cytosolic) RBC  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations (determined by fluorescent spectroscopy) are increased in septic surgical patients as in experimental endotoxemia. RBCs incubated with endotoxin had increased intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations, but these did not correlate with extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels. This phenomenon was not prevented by dantrolene, an inhibitor of intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release, and only partially prevented by calcium-channel blockade, but it was minimized by adenosine or ATP. It was also partially reversed by post-treatment with ATP, but not with adenosine [56]. These same authors [57] noted in an in vitro study that endotoxin increased intracellular free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  within RBCs but only in the presence of WBCs. Pretreatment of these RBCs with allopurinol (xanthine oxidase inhibitor), superoxide dismutase (free radical scavenger), or pentoxifylline (WBC modulator) significantly limited the rise in intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations induced by endotoxin.

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel blockers are unable to influence the deformability of normal RBCs [58, 59]. In diabetic patients, where intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  are increased, some stud-

ies have demonstrated a beneficial effect of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel blockers on RBC deformability, but at concentrations up to ten times higher than those clinically attainable ( $10^{-8}$  mol/l) [59]. Further investigations are necessary to fully define the effects of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -channel blockers on RBC deformability in sepsis.

## ATP

RBCs contain millimolar quantities of ATP [44]. These are produced within the cell by membrane-bound glycolytic pathways, and are used to maintain intracellular hydration and electrolyte composition [42]. ATP content is decreased in old RBCs [42], and this is accompanied by a loss of surface membrane SA, which might be a primary factor in the removal of old RBCs by the reticuloendothelial system.

Bergfeld and Forrester [60] documented that human RBC can release ATP in response to a hypoxic challenge. As ATP binds to receptors on the vascular endothelium, vessel calibre increases and regional blood flow improves [8, 43]. RBCs may act not only as oxygen transporters but also as oxygen sensors able to modify oxygen delivery.

Intracellular RBC ATP levels are decreased in sepsis [56], causing a decrease in energy for the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  RBC membrane pump, thereby increasing RBC intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and resulting in a decrease in cell deformability. Pretreatment with pentoxifylline may improve RBC deformability through a direct increase in intracellular ATP content [57].

## Sialic acid content of the RBC membrane

Decreased RBC SA may be an important mechanism of senescent RBC destruction by the reticulo-endothelial system [61]. Eichelbronner et al. [32] demonstrated that endotoxin promotes adhesion of human RBCs to endothelial cells in vitro, probably by decreasing SA on the RBC membrane, and thereby decreasing the repulsive force between RBCs and the endothelium.

While the effects of SA on RBC aggregation have been well described, the effects of SA on RBC shape remain controversial. We have recently demonstrated a decreased RBC membrane SA content in patients with sepsis that was associated with a modification of RBC shape [62]. Hence, there is a possible link between RBC membrane SA content and RBC shape in sepsis, as is described in other diseases such as diabetes mellitus [63, 64]. Several mechanisms may account for the decrease in SA. There may be increased activity of the SA degrading enzyme, sialidase, either by WBC as has been described in diabetic patients [65], or by the RBC membrane sialidases themselves [66]. Another mechanism could be a direct effect of bacteria upon the RBC [67].

## White blood cells (WBC)

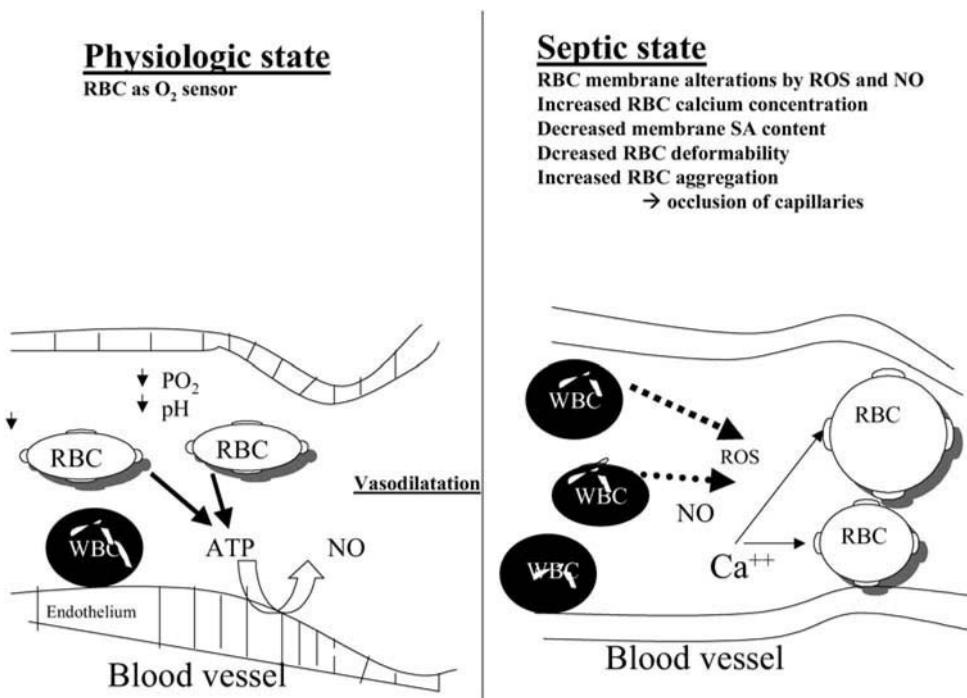
Various factors can alter RBC membrane properties including direct contact between RBCs and WBCs [29, 68, 69] or ROS that stimulate intracellular proteolysis and membrane lipid peroxidation [70, 71].

Several studies have reported that WBCs in sepsis have increased rigidity and enhanced aggregation with platelets and RBCs [7, 72, 73]. During inflammation, large numbers of WBCs adhere to or roll along the microvascular endothelium (margination), primarily in the postcapillary venules and only occasionally in the arterioles [13, 29, 74]. In the capillaries, the WBCs usually appear to flow smoothly without rotation. Occasionally, WBCs may impede RBC flow [74]. Berliner et al. [13], using a method involving a slide test and image analysis, demonstrated that both WBC and RBC adhesiveness/aggregation were increased in the peripheral venous blood of septic patients. This phenomenon may impair microvascular flow in sepsis. Moreover, activation of WBCs stimulates multiple mediator networks including the complement, kinin, coagulation and fibrinolytic cascades, along with the release of chemokines, cytokines, soluble receptors, lipid mediators, reactive oxygen species (ROS) and numerous enzymes, including elastase, myeloperoxidase and many proteases [75]. Claster and colleagues [76] demonstrated that ROS released by these activated WBC can attack RBC membranes, causing alterations in lipid and protein structure that may decrease RBC deformability and, ultimately, result in hemolysis. These authors and others also demonstrated a dose-response curve for WBC-mediated lipid peroxidation in RBCs [76, 77].

## Reactive oxygen species (ROS)

Sepsis is characterized by increased production of ROS [superoxide anion ( $\text{O}_2^-$ ), hydroxyl radical ( $\text{OH}^-$ ), and hydrogen peroxide  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ ] as well as a decrease in antioxidant defences. Damage occurs when ROS production exceeds the tissues' antioxidant defences [71, 78]. ROS produced by WBCs can also damage haemoglobin and induce haemolysis [76, 77]. Uyesaka et al. [79] demonstrated that RBCs exposed to  $\text{O}_2^-$  displayed pronounced degradation of membrane proteins (band 3 and spectrin) with formation of new protein bands that can decrease RBC deformability. In sepsis induced by caecal ligation and puncture in rats, Powell et al. [80, 81] demonstrated that the loss of RBC deformability—with increased survival—could be prevented by pre-treatment with the antioxidant a-tocopherol.

**Fig. 4** Schematic relationship between RBCs, WBCs and endothelium. *Left panel:* low  $\text{PO}_2$ , acidic pH, and decreased RBC deformability lead to ATP liberation from RBCs. These ATP molecules stimulate the endothelial cells to release NO, promoting vasodilatation. *Right panel:* septic conditions with decreased RBC deformability and increased RBC volume with RBC haemolysis. ROS were liberated by the WBC and attack the RBC membrane. The increase in NO induced by sepsis raised the intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{++}$ . This elevated  $\text{Ca}^{++}$  impairs the RBC membrane skeleton causing a decline in RBC deformability



**Table 1** Some factors influencing RBC deformability

Factor	Potential effects	References
2,3 diphosphoglycerate	Increases tissue $\text{O}_2$ delivery Decreases RBC deformability by increased internal viscosity	[35] [36]
Nitric oxide	Bound by haemoglobin Modulates vascular tone Synthesized by RBC? Modulates RBC membrane properties	[37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43] [39, 40, 41, 43] [46, 47, 48] [45, 49, 50, 51, 52]
Intracellular calcium	Increased intracellular concentrations by decreased activity of $\text{Ca}^{++}$ -ATPase pump	[53, 54, 55, 56, 57]
Adenosine triphosphate	Mediates NO release Maintains intracellular hydration and activity of ionic pumps Released by RBC to improve blood flow	[8, 40, 41, 43] [42, 56, 57, 60] [8, 43, 60]
Sialic acid	Signal recognition for capture by the reticulo-endothelial system. Modifies RBC shape Increases RBC aggregation	[61, 64] [62, 63, 64] [32, 61, 63]
White blood cells	Increase aggregation with RBCs Produce ROS	[7, 13, 29, 68, 69, 72, 73, 74] [70, 71, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81]
Reactive oxygen species (ROS)	Induce degradation of RBC membrane proteins Decrease RBC deformability	[71, 76, 77, 78] [79, 80, 81]
Temperature	Influences in vitro results of RBC deformability	[82, 83, 84, 85]

#### Effects of temperature

RBC membrane mechanical properties are known to be temperature sensitive. Temperature can have significant effects on RBC deformability. In RBCs from healthy subjects, the elongation index (representing deformability) decreased significantly with a fall in temperature from 37 °C to 5 °C [82]. Artmann and colleagues [83] noted that human RBCs undergo a sudden change from

blocking to passing through 1.3±0.2 µm micropipettes at a critical temperature of 36.4±0.3 °C. The authors attributed these findings to an elastomeric transition of haemoglobin from gel-like to fluid, and to an elastomeric transition of membrane proteins such as spectrin [83].

In septic and non-septic rats, Baskurt and Mat [84] noted differences in RBC elongation index only at 37 °C using ektacytometry, while in RBCs from rats incubated with endotoxin (*E. coli*; 75 µg/ml), Jagger et al. [85] not-

ed alterations in RBC deformability measured using the micropipette aspiration technique at 25 °C but not at 37 °C. These authors underline the effect of room temperature measurement on physical membrane properties, which may perhaps exaggerate the differences between normal and perturbed RBCs. The effects of temperature on RBC deformability in sepsis and, in particular, the *in vivo* relevance of these data clearly require further study. The various factors involved in RBC deformability alterations are summarized in Table 1 and Fig. 4.

## Conclusion

Alterations in RBC rheology may contribute to the microvascular injury and impaired oxygen supply seen

in sepsis. Multiple factors may be involved including NO and ROS, altered calcium homeostasis, decrease in ATP reserves, increase in intracellular 2,3 DPG, membrane components (sialic acid), and WBC interactions.

Importantly, the RBC is more than an oxygen transporter but also an oxygen sensor and may itself augment blood flow by liberation of ATP and O<sub>2</sub> delivery wherever and whenever the need might arise. New thinking regarding this well-studied cell will lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms of RBC rheological alterations in sepsis and their effect on blood flow and O<sub>2</sub> transport. This may be important in the development of new therapeutic strategies to improve cellular oxygen availability, and thereby reduce organ failure in severe sepsis and septic shock.

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## **Stress-hyperglycemia, insulin and immunomodulation in sepsis**

**Abstract** Stress-hyperglycemia and insulin resistance are exceedingly common in critically ill patients, particularly those with sepsis. Multiple pathogenetic mechanisms are responsible for this metabolic syndrome; however, increased release of pro-inflammatory mediators and counter-regulatory hormones may play a pivotal role. Recent data suggests that hyperglycemia may potentiate the pro-inflammatory response while insulin has the opposite effect. Furthermore, emerging evidence

suggests that tight glycemic control will improve the outcome of critically ill patients. This paper reviews the pathophysiology of stress hyperglycemia in the critically ill septic patient and outlines a treatment strategy for the management of this disorder.

**Keywords** Insulin · Glucose · Sepsis · Sepsis syndrome · Critical illness · Insulin resistance · Hyperglycemia

### **Introduction**

In recent decades the reported incidence of sepsis has increased dramatically, largely due to the advancing age of the population, an increased number of invasive procedures being performed and immunosuppressive therapy [1]. In the United States, approximately 750,000 cases of sepsis occur each year, at least 225,000 of which are fatal [2]. Despite the use of antimicrobial agents and advanced life-support care, the case fatality rate for patients with sepsis has remained between 30 and 40% over the past three decades [2, 3].

When the body is challenged by foreign microbial agents homeostatic mechanisms come into play that attempt to rid the body of the foreign agent without damaging the host. This involves the activation of pro- and anti-inflammatory pathways which are tightly controlled and regulated [4]. In most infected persons, the body is able to achieve a balance between pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory mediators and homeostasis is restored. In some patients, however, this balance is upset with an excessive pro-inflammatory response re-

sulting in the systemic inflammatory response syndrome (SIRS), multisystem organ dysfunction, and ultimately death [4, 5, 6, 7]. Attempts at down-regulating the pro-inflammatory response with novel agents directed at specific pro-inflammatory mediators has uniformly met with failure [4, 8, 9, 10]. Recent provocative data suggests that tight glycemic control with insulin may restore the balance between pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory mediators and improve the outcome of critically ill patients [11, 12].

In this article we review the physiology of stress hyperglycemia and the immune-modulatory role of insulin in critically ill patients. The reader should be cautioned that many of the studies quoted in our review were performed in non-critically ill patients, many of whom were diabetic. While it is likely that the pathogenetic pathways are similar in both groups of patients, many of these postulates remain unproven in the critical care setting.

## Endocrinology of stress

Stress associated with critical illness is characterized by activation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis with the release of cortisol from the adrenal gland [13]. Activation of the HPA axis with the release of cortisol is an essential component of the general adaptation to illness and stress and contributes to the maintenance of cellular and organ homeostasis.

In addition to increased cortisol secretion the stress response is characterized by a marked increase in the release of norepinephrine and epinephrine as well as glucagon and growth hormone [14, 15, 16]. Insulin levels are usually normal or decreased, despite peripheral insulin resistance [17, 18, 19]. It has been suggested that insulin release may be suppressed as the result of increased activation of the pancreatic alpha receptors [19]. In addition to causing insulin resistance, interleukin-1 (IL-1) and tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ) inhibit insulin release, an effect which appears to be concentration dependent [20]. The low to normal insulin levels together with insulin resistance in the presence of increased secretion of the counter-regulatory hormones results in stress hyperglycemia (see discussion below).

## Glucose transporters and the mechanism of insulin action

Glucose is normally taken up across the cellular membranes by a system of carrier-mediated facilitated transport [21]. Five transporter isoforms exists. Three of the isoforms, GLUT 1, GLUT 2, and GLUT 4, are important for glucose uptake [21]. GLUT 1 can be found in many tissues and is responsible for basal uptake. It has a high affinity for glucose and it ensures transport even under the conditions of hypoglycemia. GLUT 2 mediates uptake and release of glucose by hepatocytes and regulation of glucose-stimulated insulin secretion in pancreas. The GLUT2 transporter ensures that the liver is freely permeable to glucose and that glucose transport is not rate-limiting for hepatic glucose uptake. GLUT 4 isoform is involved in glucose transport in tissues where uptake is mediated by insulin which includes skeletal muscle, cardiac muscle, and adipose tissue. Binding of insulin to cell-surface receptors results in autophosphorylation and activation of an intrinsic tyrosine kinase molecule of the insulin receptor (IR) b-subunit. Activated tyrosine kinase subsequently phosphorylates messenger molecular proteins known as insulin receptor substrates (IRS1 and IRS2). The IRS-1 associates with several proteins including the enzyme phosphatidylinositol (PI) 3-kinase. Physiologically insulin increases glucose uptake into the cell by causing translocation of GLUT 4 from intracellular compartments to the plasma membrane. The signaling enzyme molecule PI-3-kinase is essential for insulin

stimulated GLUT 4 translocation [22]. PI-3-kinase also mediates many of the metabolic effects of insulin, including activation of glycogen synthase, protein synthesis, lipogenesis, and the regulation of various genes in insulin-responsive cells including inhibition of phosphoenol pyruvate carboxykinase (PEPCK), the key enzyme of gluconeogenesis.

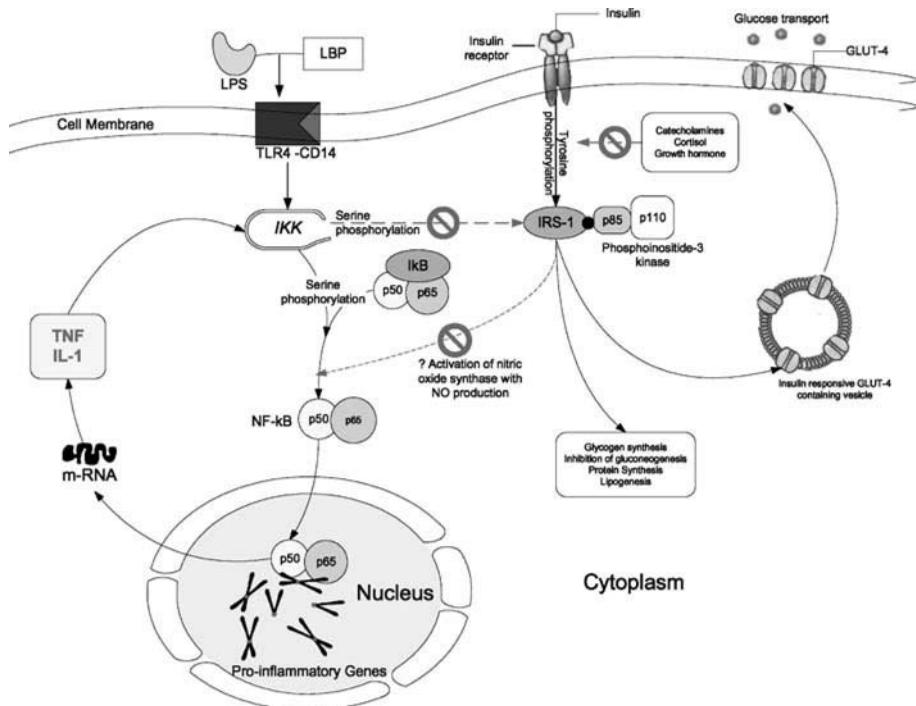
## Mechanisms of stress-induced hyperglycemia and insulin resistance in sepsis

The prevalence of stress hyperglycemia in sepsis and critical illness is difficult to establish due to limited data and variations in the definition of hyperglycemia. Stress hyperglycemia has been previously defined as a plasma glucose above 200 mg/dl [23]; however, in view of the results of the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial (see below), stress hyperglycemia should be considered in any critically ill patient with a blood glucose in excess of 110 mg/dl [11]. In a study of septic non-diabetic ICU patients 75% had a baseline blood glucose level above 110 mg/dl [24]. In the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial, 12% of patients had a baseline blood glucose above 200 mg/dl; however, 74.5% of patients had a baseline blood glucose above 110 mg/dl, with 97.5% having a recorded blood glucose level above 110 mg/dl sometime during their ICU stay [11].

Changes in whole-body glucose uptake and glucose oxidation in sepsis are complex and may depend on the severity of illness and the stage of the disease. Whole-body glucose uptake and glucose oxidation may be increased in the early stages of sepsis and endotoxemia [25, 26]. This may be the result of cytokine-induced increase in non-insulin mediated glucose uptake by tissues rich in mononuclear phagocytes, including the liver, spleen, ileum, and lung [27, 28]. Enhanced non-insulin mediated glucose uptake appears to result from an increase in the synthesis, concentration or activity of the GLUT1 transporter [29, 30]. With the development of insulin resistance (see below) glucose utilization and oxidation may decrease [25, 31, 32]. Exogenous insulin increases glucose utilization and oxidation; however, non-oxidative disposal (storage) remains impaired [25, 31, 32].

The metabolic milieu in which stress-induced hyperglycemia develops in the critically ill in the absence of pre-existing diabetes mellitus is complex. A combination of several factors, including the presence of excessive counter regulatory hormones such as glucagon, growth hormone, catecholamines, glucocorticoids, and cytokines such as IL-1, IL-6, and TNF- $\alpha$  combined with exogenous administration of catecholamines, dextrose, and nutritional support together with relative insulin deficiency, play an important role [23]. Increased gluconeogenesis combined with hepatic insulin resistance are the major factors

**Fig. 1** Postulated interaction between the insulin signaling pathway and activation of the pro-inflammatory cascade in the pathogenesis of stress hyperglycemia of sepsis. *LPS* lipopolysaccharide, *LBP* lipopolysaccharide binding protein, *TLR4* Toll-like receptor 4, *IκB* inhibitor, *IKK* inhibitor κB kinase, *IRS-1*, insulin receptor substrate-1, *IL-1* interleukin-1, *TNF* tumor necrosis factor, *NF-κB* nuclear factor-kappa B



leading to hyperglycemia [33]. Recent human data suggests that hepatic insulin resistance (and PEPCK suppression) remains refractory to intensive insulin therapy [34]. Increased hepatic output of glucose may therefore be more important than peripheral insulin resistance in the genesis of stress hyperglycemia [35]. Gluconeogenic substrates released during stress include lactate, alanine, and glycerol with exogenous glucose failing to suppress gluconeogenesis [16, 36]. Glucagon is the primary hormonal mediator of gluconeogenesis, with septic patients having a significant increase in serum glucagon levels [16]. This effect is mediated by adrenergic stimulation by catecholamines and by cytokines [37]. In addition, cytokines such as TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-1 and catecholamines independently and synergistically promote hepatic glucose production [38, 39].

Sepsis is characterized by marked insulin resistance [19, 25, 31, 32, 40, 41]. The insulin resistance in sepsis is directly proportional to the severity of stress response [19]. During sepsis, insulin induced tyrosine phosphorylation of IRS-1 and subsequent activation of PI-3-kinase is impaired resulting in defective GLUT-4 receptor translocation, diminished glucose uptake, insulin resistance in skeletal muscle, and hepatic insulin resistance [22]. The mechanism whereby sepsis induces these alterations are unknown, but increased levels of TNF- $\alpha$  may play a key role. Aljada and colleagues have demonstrated that in endothelial cells TNF- $\alpha$  causes a reduction of tyrosine phosphorylation and expression of the insulin receptor [42]. TNF- $\alpha$  diminishes insulin-

induced IRS-1 tyrosine phosphorylation in hepatocytes and adipocytes and impairs the activation of PI-3 kinase [43, 44, 45, 46]. These alterations of the early steps in insulin action are probably mediated by TNF- $\alpha$  induced IRS-1 serine phosphorylation [43, 46, 47, 48]. Upon serine phosphorylation, IRS1 proteins have a reduced ability to interact with the insulin receptor, to be tyrosine phosphorylated by the insulin receptor and to bind phosphatidylinositol-3 kinase [44, 45].

Recently, Gao and colleagues have demonstrated that activation of the inhibitor κB kinase (IKK) complex is associated with serine phosphorylation of IRS-1 [49]. The IKK is activated by endotoxin via Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) as well as by TNF- $\alpha$  and interleukin-1 (IL-1) [50, 51, 52]. The IKK is a serine kinase that controls the activation of nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-κB) a ubiquitous nuclear transcription factor closely associated with the activation of the genes for almost all of the pro-inflammatory mediators [53]. Before activation, NF-κB is bound to inhibitor κB (I κB). This association between I κB and NF-κB results in the cytosolic localization of NF-κB. The serine phosphorylation of I κB by the IKK complex results in the degradation of I κB followed by the nuclear translocation of NF κB. The serine phosphorylation of IRS-1 and I κB by IKK may partly explain the insulin resistance noted with activation of the pro-inflammatory cascade (see Fig. 1).

Catecholamines have also been shown to inhibit insulin binding, tyrosine kinase activity, and translocation of GLUT-4 either directly through a receptor or a post-

receptor mechanism [54, 55]. Blockade of  $\alpha_2$  adrenergic receptors has been demonstrated to reduce insulin resistance in septic rats [40]. Glucocorticoids impair insulin mediated glucose uptake in skeletal muscle, by down regulating various signaling proteins with resulting inhibition of translocation of GLUT-4 glucose transporter from its internal membrane stores to the plasma membrane [56]. Growth hormone inhibits the insulin pathway by reducing insulin receptors and impairing its activation through phosphorylation on tyrosine residues [57, 58].

### **Deleterious effects of hyperglycemia in the critically ill**

To some extent the deleterious effects of hyperglycemia in the critically ill are similar to that of actual diabetes, although the time scale obviously differs [59]. Stress hyperglycemia but not pre-existing diabetes has been shown to be associated with a worse outcome following acute myocardial infarction and stroke [60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66]. The plasma glucose level on admission has been shown to be an independent predictor of prognosis after myocardial infarction [60, 61]. In diabetic patients with acute myocardial infarction, therapy to maintain blood glucose at a level below 215 mg/dl improves outcome [62, 63, 64]. The presence of hyperglycemia following an ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke is associated with a two- to threefold increased mortality and significant impairment in functional recovery [65, 66].

#### **Pro-inflammatory effects**

Glucose has been shown to be a powerful pro-inflammatory mediator [67], and tight glucose control below 110 mg/dl with insulin has been shown to exert anti-inflammatory effects in the critically ill patient [68]. The oral administration of 75 g of glucose to healthy volunteers increases reactive oxygen species (ROS) generation by polymorphonuclear leukocytes and mononuclear cells [69]. Similarly, an oral glucose load has been demonstrated to increase plasma IL-8 levels [70]. Chettab and coworkers have demonstrated that hyperglycemia up-regulates the IL-8 gene [71]. IL-8 is a potent neutrophil chemoattractant, playing an important role in inflammation [72, 73, 74]. Glucose induces an increase in intranuclear NF- $\kappa$ B, a fall in cytosolic I  $\kappa$ B, and an increase in I  $\kappa$ B kinase in vivo and in vitro which are pro-inflammatory [75, 76, 77]. Glucose also has been shown to exert pro-thrombotic effects and to increase oxidative stress due to increased lipid peroxidation [78, 79]. Glucose increases the expression and plasma concentration of matrix metalloproteinase-2 (MMP-2) and MMP-9, which aid in spread of inflammation [80]. Acute hyperglycemia re-

duces endothelial nitric oxide levels, causing abnormal vascular reactivity and organ perfusion [81].

#### **Increased susceptibility to infection**

In diabetic patients hyperglycemia has long been known to increase the susceptibility to infections [82]. In critically ill surgical and burn patients tight glycemic control has been demonstrated to reduce the risk of septic morbidity [11, 83, 84, 85]. The in vitro responsiveness of leukocytes stimulated by inflammatory mediators is inversely correlated with glycemic control [86, 87]. Rassias and colleagues demonstrated that tight glycemic control partially prevented the postoperative decrease in neutrophil phagocytic activity [88]. In addition, hyperglycemia has been demonstrated to decrease the oxidative burst of leukocytes [89, 90].

### **Immune-modulatory role of insulin in sepsis**

Besides control of hyperglycemia, insulin has potent acute anti-inflammatory effects. In a group of obese subjects, Dandona and colleagues demonstrated that an infusion of insulin was associated with a significant fall of intranuclear NF- $\kappa$ B, and increase in I  $\kappa$ B in mononuclear cells [91]. These changes were associated with a fall in the generation of reactive oxygen species and a fall in the serum levels of soluble intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (sICAM-1), monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1), and plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 (PAI-1) [91]. In a similar experiment Aljada et al. demonstrated that insulin decreased expression of the pro-inflammatory transcription factor, early growth response-1 (EGR-1), and this was associated with a significant fall in plasma tissue factor (TF) and PAI-1 levels [92]; thus, while hyperglycemia has pro-thrombotic effects, insulin has anti-thrombotic and fibrinolytic effects by suppressing TF and PAI-1.

One mechanism underlying the anti-inflammatory effect of insulin may be through the release of nitric oxide (NO) from the endothelium. Insulin has been demonstrated to induce an increase in the expression NO synthase (NOS), the enzyme that generates NO [93]. The NO has been demonstrated to down-regulate the expression of endothelial cell adhesion molecules (ECAMs) as well as the pro-inflammatory cytokines [94, 95, 96, 97, 98]. While the anti-inflammatory effects of NO have not been fully delineated, it is thought that NO inhibits the activation of NF- $\kappa$ B. Several authors have demonstrated that NO S-nitrosylates a key thiol group in the DNA binding domain of NF- $\kappa$ B p50 and that this is associated with decreased gene transcription and synthesis of NF- $\kappa$ B [96, 99, 100].

## NF- $\kappa$ B as a therapeutic target for tight glycemic control

NF- $\kappa$ B is a nuclear transcription factor involved in the regulation of over 150 genes related to inflammation, including TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1, IL-6, IL-8, cyclooxygenase-2, and inducible nitric oxide synthase [53, 101]. Excessive activation of NF- $\kappa$ B has been identified as a marker of poor prognosis in sepsis [102, 103, 104]. Emerging data suggests that NF- $\kappa$ B may be a therapeutic target for the adjuvant treatment of sepsis [105, 106, 107, 108]. The data cited above suggests that tight glycemic control with insulin may decrease NF- $\kappa$ B activation. This hypothesis is supported by the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial in which mannose-binding lectin (MBL) and C-reactive protein (CRP) levels were significantly suppressed by intensive insulin therapy [68].

## Intensive insulin therapy in the critically ill

Van Den Berghe et al. in a prospective randomized controlled study involving 1548 patients demonstrated that intensive insulin therapy reduced mortality and morbidity among patients admitted to a surgical critical care unit (the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial) [11, 12]. These authors compared an intensive insulin therapy regimen aimed to maintain blood glucose between 80 and 110 mg/dl with conventional treatment in which insulin infusion was only initiated when glucose level was greater than 215 mg/dl and maintenance of glucose between 180 and 200 mg/dl. At 12 months the mortality was 4.6% with the intensive insulin regimen compared with 8.0% in the control group. The benefit was most apparent in patients with greater than 5 days of stay in the intensive care unit. Intensive insulin therapy reduced bloodstream infections by 46%, acute renal failure by 41%, and critical illness poly-neuropathy by 44%. Using multivariate analysis the authors suggested that improved metabolic control, as reflected by normoglycemia, rather than the infused insulin dose per se, was responsible for the beneficial effects of intensive insulin therapy [12]; however, achieving normoglycemia and the administration of insulin are linked, and from the available evidence it appears likely that both factors played a key role in the improved outcome.

The outcome data from the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial indicates that there is a dose response curve between the degree of glycemic control and hospital mortality [12]. In the long stay patients (>5 days in the ICU) the cumulative hospital mortality was 15% in patients with a mean blood glucose less than 110 mg/dl, 25% in those with a blood glucose between 110 and 150 mg/dl, and 40% in those with a mean blood glucose of greater than 150 mg/dl. In diabetic patients with acute myocardial infarction, therapy to maintain blood glucose

at a level below 215 mg/dl improves outcome [62, 63, 64]. This data suggests that even "modest" glycemic control will have an impact on patient outcome. This is very important as in the "real world" it may be very difficult (if not somewhat risky) to attempt to maintain a blood glucose in the range of 80–110 mg/dl. This goal may only be achievable in ICUs with a high nursing-to-patient ratio and close physician supervision. On the other hand, the Leuven study showed that in order to improve morbidity by reducing the incidence of bacteremia, acute renal failure, critical illness polyneuropathy, and transfusion requirements, a blood glucose level of <110 mg/dl was required. Indeed, a blood glucose level of 110–150 mg/dl was not effective on these morbidity measures as compared with >150 mg/dl [12]. It is also important to note that in the Leuven Intensive Insulin Therapy Trial all patients received between 200 and 300 g of intravenous glucose on the day of admission followed by parenteral or enteral (or both) nutrition started on the second ICU day. In this study tight early glycemic control was associated with the more rapid improvement of insulin resistance [12]. Based on the results of this study we recommend the initiation of parenteral glucose and enteral nutrition in all ICU patients on the day of ICU admission [109, 110, 111] and the initiation of an insulin infusion in patients with a blood glucose above 150 mg/dl (a threshold of 110 mg/dl may be appropriate in select ICUs). Subcutaneous insulin "sliding scales" are not recommended, at least during the first few days, until the patient's medical condition has stabilized, the blood glucose is well controlled, and the patient has achieved his/her nutritional goal.

Thiazolidinediones are a new class of drugs that are used in the treatment of type-II diabetes mellitus. These drugs reduce insulin resistance through its binding to peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors- $\lambda$  (PPAR $\lambda$ ). Ghanim and colleagues demonstrated that troglitazone caused a significant fall in cellular NF- $\kappa$ B with an increase in I  $\kappa$ B in mononuclear cells of diabetic subjects [112]. The changes were associated with a parallel fall in serum levels of TNF- $\alpha$ , sICAM, MCP-1, and PAI-1. While one expects these effects to be useful in chronic situation, it is relevant that these anti-inflammatory were observed within 3–7 days [112, 113]. In an experimental model of acute myocardial infarction, even a single dose of rosiglitazone has been shown to reduce myocardial damage by 50% [114, 115]. Thiazolidinediones may therefore have a role in the metabolic management of patients with sepsis; however, clinical studies are required before these agents can be recommended.

## Conclusion

Stress-hyperglycemia and insulin resistance are almost universal findings in patients with sepsis. Multiple pathogenetic mechanisms are responsible for this metabolic

syndrome; however, increased release of pro-inflammatory mediators and counter-regulatory hormones may play a pivotal role. Hyperglycemia per se is pro-inflammatory,

whereas insulin has anti-inflammatory properties. Emerging evidence suggests that tight glycemic control with insulin will improve the outcome of critically ill patients.

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## Hypothalamic-pituitary dysfunction in critically ill patients with traumatic and nontraumatic brain injury

**Abstract** *Background:* A significant number of studies have shown that critically ill patients with brain injury (BI) frequently exhibit abnormal pituitary hormonal responses during the immediate postinjury period. *Discussion:* The elucidation of endocrine alterations depends on the criteria used, the diagnostic tests applied, and the timing of testing in relation to BI. The pattern of the detected hormonal abnormalities shows considerable variability. Altered endocrine responses are due mostly to hypothalamic changes rather than to pituitary dysfunction. Several studies have examined the correlation between hormonal alterations and BI severity, but the results are inconsistent. Furthermore, it remains currently unclear whether and how pituitary abnormalities adversely affect the clinical course of BI patients during the pe-

riod of critical illness. On the basis of current knowledge, with the exception of clinically significant relative adrenal deficiency and diabetes insipidus, the other endocrine alterations do not seem to require any therapeutic intervention in severely ill BI patients. It is also uncertain whether hormonal abnormalities detected in the early post-BI period persist for the rest of these patients' lives. *Conclusions:* In view of current evidence indicating a high incidence of pituitary dysfunction even years following BI it is recommended that repetition of endocrine evaluation should be performed during the rehabilitation phase in all patients.

**Keywords** Brain injury · Critical illness · Endocrine alterations · Treatment · Outcome · Recovery

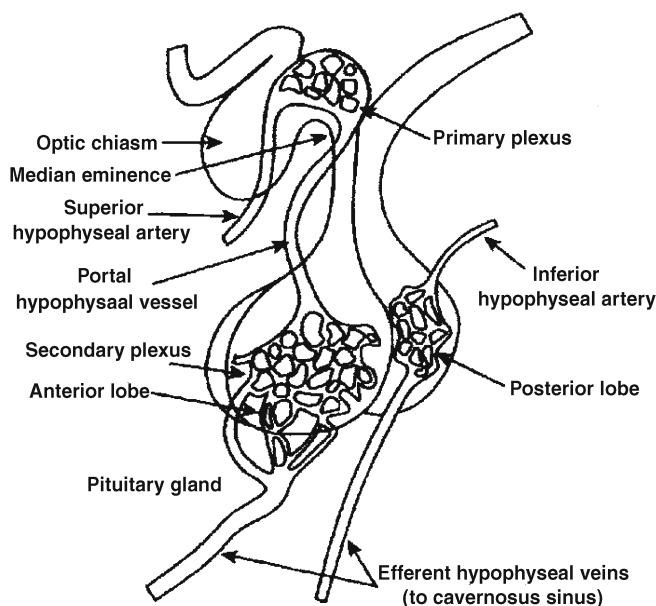
### Introduction

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a leading cause of death and disability in young adults [1]. Nontraumatic brain injury (BI) includes ischemic stroke, intracerebral hemorrhage, and aneurysmal subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) and constitutes a major public-health burden [2]. Advanced life support in the intensive care unit may be needed in a number of BI patients [3].

Pituitary function is an important regulator of a variety of adaptive responses that allow survival during critical states of any type. The mechanisms regulating pituitary hormone secretion are located within the hypothalamus and the brainstem; consequently acute BI as a result of

trauma, stroke, or aneurysmal SAH more than any other type of severe illness might be expected to modify the neuroendocrine responses. Autopsy studies show that more than two-third of patients dying of severe head injury have structural abnormalities in the hypothalamic-pituitary region [4]. Therefore it is not surprising that over the past few years pituitary dysfunction has been increasingly reported in patients with TBI [5, 6, 7].

In this review we first briefly discuss the anatomy of the hypothalamic-pituitary axis and the pathophysiology of pituitary dysfunction along with the endocrinology of the normal stress response. Thereafter we outline the existing data regarding the frequency and pattern of pituitary dysfunction in critically ill patients with TBI and



**Fig. 1** Anatomy of the hypothalamic-pituitary axis [8]

nontraumatic BI and the clinical relevance of these abnormalities. For this the PubMed search strategy “brain injury and endocrine alterations” was used. Case reports and investigations with a small number of patients (less than five) were excluded.

### Anatomy of the hypothalamic-pituitary axis and pathophysiology of pituitary dysfunction following brain injury

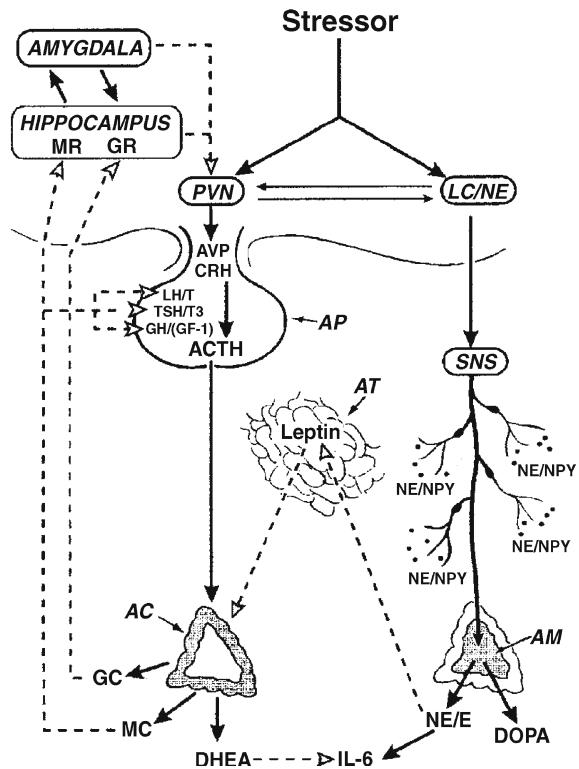
The anatomy of the axis is shown in Fig. 1 [8]. The hypothalamus is a structure formed by the anterior and inferior parts of the walls of the third ventricle. It is attached to the pituitary via the stalk, which is derived from the median eminence, a region of the floor of the third ventricle. The median eminence receives the endings of hypothalamic neurons, which produce releasing and inhibiting factors controlling the function of the anterior pituitary lobe. The pituitary is constructed by two parts, the anterior lobe, or adenohypophysis, and the posterior lobe, or neurohypophysis. The adenohypophysis is divided into three regions: (a) the pars distalis, which comprises the major portion of the anterior lobe, (b) the pars intermedia, and (c) the pars tuberalis. The blood supply of the hypothalamus is provided from small branches of all arteries of the circle of Willis. Arterial supply to the anterior pituitary lobe, median eminence, and stalk is derived from paired superior hypophyseal arteries. These arteries form the primary vascular plexus, and converge into venules to form the long and short hypophyseal portal veins. These veins descend to the pars tuberalis and pars distalis of the anterior lobe, where a

secondary plexus of sinusoidal capillaries is formed. The long portal veins pass through the diaphragma sella, being thus vulnerable to mechanical compression from brain or pituitary swelling or direct stalk injury. In contrast, the short portal veins originate below the diaphragma sella. Thus the anterior pituitary lobe, particularly its lateral aspects, receives its blood supply indirectly after passage through the median eminence and portal vessels. Consequently any interruption of the portal vessels can result in anterior pituitary dysfunction. In contrast, the neurohypophysis receives a direct arterial blood supply from the inferior hypophyseal arteries.

There are several ways by which BI may adversely affect pituitary function. Direct or indirect (i.e., diffuse brain swelling) mechanical trauma to the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, stalk or vessels is one possible explanation [4, 5, 6]. Functional alterations may also affect pituitary hormone levels. In this context, drugs (opiates, sedatives, antiepileptics, or corticosteroids) have been implicated [9, 10]. During acute BI cytokines, such as tumor necrosis factor  $\alpha$ , interleukin 1, and interleukin 6, are produced in large amounts [11]. These may influence hormone levels by exerting stimulatory and/or inhibitory effects [12]. Finally, pituitary dysfunction has been linked to secondary cerebral insults, including hypotension and hypoxemia [13].

### Endocrinology of the normal stress response

The endocrinology of the normal stress response is presented in Fig. 2 [14, 15]. The body reacts to hostile conditions by complex physiological and behavioral central nervous system and peripheral adaptive responses. The brain, particularly the hippocampus and amygdala, is intimately involved in the stress response. The stress response is mediated mainly by the sympathoadrenal system (SAS), which includes the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the adrenal medulla, and by the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The HPA axis and the SAS are functionally related. Activation of SAS results to secretion of epinephrine and norepinephrine from the adrenal medulla and to an increased production of interleukin 6. Activation of the HPA axis involves increased secretion in the hypothalamus of corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) and arginine vasopressin, which enhances CRH activity. CRH stimulates the production of corticotropin (ACTH), causing the adrenal cortex to produce more cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone; in addition, CRH activates the SAS and SNS. During stress the growth, reproductive and thyroid axes are inhibited at many levels. Glucocorticoids suppress the secretion of growth hormone (GH) and thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) and exert an inhibitory effect on the pituitary gonadotrophs and the gonads [16]. These adaptations are initially protective for the human body, how-



**Fig. 2** Endocrinology of the normal stress response. *Straight lines* Stimulation; *dashed lines* inhibition; PVN paraventricular nucleus; AVP arginine vasopressin; CRH corticotropin-releasing hormone; ACTH corticotropin; AP anterior pituitary; AC adrenal cortex; GC glucocorticoids; MC mineralocorticoids; DHEA dehydroepiandrosterone; LH/T luteinizing hormone/testosterone; TSH/T<sub>3</sub> thyrotropin/triiodothyronine; GH/IGF-1 growth hormone/insulin-like growth factor 1; MR mineralocorticoid receptors; GR glucocorticoid receptors; LC/NE locus ceruleus/norepinephrine; SNS sympathetic nervous system; NPY neuropeptide Y; AM adrenal medulla; E epinephrine; IL-6 interleukin-6; AT adipose tissue [14, 15]

ever, if inadequate or excessive they may damage health, causing endocrine, metabolic, autoimmune, and psychiatric disturbances [14, 15, 16].

### Anterior pituitary dysfunction in brain injury

Anterior pituitary dysfunction in critically ill patients with TBI

In recent years TBI has been increasingly recognized as a cause of neuroendocrine dysfunction [5, 6]. For example, TBI is considered as one of the causes of adult-onset hypopituitarism [7]. Several studies have investigated the anterior pituitary function in TBI patients during the period of critical illness (Table 1) [17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39].

### HPA axis

The HPA axis status is probably the most extensively investigated endocrine function in acute or critically ill TBI patients [18, 20, 27, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39]. Normally patients present with high cortisol levels [18, 20, 28, 32, 34, 35]. These may persist up to 15 days after the trauma [35] and are essential in maintaining vascular tone and endothelial integrity and in potentiating the vasoconstrictor actions of catecholamines [40]. Initially the increase in cortisol is mediated by ACTH [34]. Later other substances, possibly cytokines or catecholamines, act as mediators [12]. The diurnal variation in cortisol may be preserved or abolished [18, 39]. The administration of dexamethasone results in a decrease in plasma cortisol, suggesting an intact negative feedback control mechanism [18].

Studies examining the associations between cortisol dynamics, severity of TBI and outcome prediction have yielded controversial results. Some investigations infer that higher cortisol values are associated with more severe head trauma and with a worse clinical outcome [18, 28, 32, 34], whereas others find lower cortisol values in the most severely injured patients having brainstem dysfunction [20] or in brain-dead victims [41]. Other studies found no correlations between baseline cortisol and TBI severity [35, 37].

The adequacy of cortisol secretion in critical illness, including TBI, remains a diagnostic challenge. This is due mainly to the fact that the normal ranges for baseline or stimulated cortisol levels remain poorly defined. Also, there is much debate on which stimulation test should be used for diagnosis [9, 40]. Assays for serum cortisol measure the total hormone concentration (serum free cortisol plus the protein bound fraction of cortisol). It is believed that free cortisol is responsible for the physiological actions of the hormone. Moreover, it is well known that 90% of circulating cortisol is bound to proteins (corticosteroid-binding globulin and albumin), which both decline in critical illness. Thus in severe illness free cortisol may be a better indicator of adrenal function [42]. On the other hand, measurement of free cortisol is not easily available; thus total cortisol concentration remains the most suitable marker of adrenal function.

Despite the above difficulties some studies have examined relative adrenal dysfunction in critically ill TBI patients (Table 2) [36, 37, 38, 43]. In one of our studies we used the low-dose (1 µg) ACTH stimulation test [43]. This dose of ACTH is similar to the amounts of pituitary ACTH produced under intense stress stimulation [44]. An inadequate adrenal response to this dose indicates that the affected individual is not able to produce adequate amounts of cortisol whenever the need arises. However, the test that we applied indicates adrenal inability to mount a normal cortisol response and does not necessarily

**Table 1** Studies on anterior pituitary function in patients with traumatic brain injury during the period of critical illness (BS brainstem, CBG corticosteroid binding-globulin, F cortisol, GT gonadotropic, HPA hypothalamic pituitary adrenal, ICP intracranial pressure, LT lactotrophic, NE norepinephrine, SNS sympathetic nervous system, ST somatotropic, TBI traumatic brain injury, TH thyroid)

Reference	n	Axes tested	Main findings
Fleischer et al. [17]	15	TH, GT	Central hypothyroidism/gonadism
Steinbock and Thompson [18]	49	HPA	Diurnal rhythm of F altered, high F levels, correlations with TBI severity
King et al. [19]	6	TH, GT, ST, LT	No trends in hormone levels
Feibel et al. [20]	14	HPA	F depends on ICP level and BS function
Matsuura et al. [21]	30	TH, LT	Hormone levels relate to TBI severity
Woolf et al. [22]	54	GT	Frequent hypogonadism, mostly transient
Woolf et al. [23]	31	HPA, GT	Hypogonadism relates to SNS activity
Clark et al. [24]	33	GT, LT	Persistent, central hypogonadism
Woolf et al. [25]	66	TH	TH dysfunction relates to outcome
Chiolero et al. [26]	35	TH	High incidence of TH dysfunction
Chiolero et al. [27]	36	TH, HPA, GT, ST, LT	Hormone levels relate to TBI severity
Woolf et al. [28]	120	HPA	High F associated with bad outcome
Ziegler et al. [29]	23	TH	TH dysfunction correlated with NE
Gottardis et al. [30]	10	TH, ST	Hormone levels predict prognosis
Hackl et al. [31]	21	TH, HPA, GT, ST, LT	Hormones do not predict outcome
Pentelenyi [32]	81	HPA, ST	High F associated with fatal outcome
Mocchegiani et al. [33]	31	TH	TH function weakly associated with survival
Koiv et al. [34]	55	HPA	HPA activity relates to prognosis
Della Corte et al. [35]	22	TH, HPA, ST, LT	Hormonal responses linked to outcome
Hoer et al. [36]	34	HPA	Frequently impaired adrenal reserve
Dimopoulou et al. [37]	34	TH, HPA, GT, ST, LT	High incidence of endocrine alterations
Agha et al. [38]	50	TH, HPA, GT, ST, LT	High incidence of endocrine alterations
Savaridas et al. [39]	9	HPA	High free F, low CBG

**Table 2** Results of studies investigating relative adrenal dysfunction in TBI patients during the period of critical illness (GST glucagon stimulation test, hCRH human corticotrophin-releasing hor-

mone, HDST high-dose stimulation test, LDST low-dose stimulation test, TBI traumatic brain injury)

Reference	n	Study entry postinjury	Diagnostic test	Definition of relative adrenal dysfunction	Incidence of relative adrenal dysfunction (%)
Hohen et al. [36]	34	6–63 h	HDST	Increment in cortisol <9 µg/dl	47
Dimopoulou et al. [37]	34	9–60 days	hCRH	Peak cortisol <20 µg/dl	24
Agha et al. [38]	50	7–20 days	GST	Peak cortisol <450 nmol/l	16
Dimopoulou et al. [43]	40	7–60 days	LDST	Peak cortisol <18 µg/dl	15

demonstrate a central defect in the HPA axis. For this reason and to localize the site of HPA axis dysfunction in TBI patients human CRH was applied, and it was found that a subset of patients fail to augment ACTH appropriately in response to human CRH, suggesting a central defect, i.e., hypothalamic-pituitary failure. However, the majority showed increased ACTH after human CRH, indicating primary adrenal dysfunction as the most common cause of inadequate cortisol responses in this clinical setting [43].

Taken together these data indicate that at least one in ten patients with acute TBI develops inadequate HPA function. It seems that in the majority of patients this dysregulation is reminiscent of the relative adrenal insufficiency that presents in a substantial proportion of patients with severe illness. However, it should be mentioned that in a subset of patients HPA dysfunction is centrally mediated. These cases are most likely the result of TBI.

#### Somatotropic axis

Early after TBI basal plasma GH is within normal limits [30] or high [19, 27, 31]. Insulin-like growth factor 1 has been shown to be normal, or low [37]. However, the adequacy of GH reserve is best investigated by dynamic testing [45]. Agha and coworkers [38] evaluated 50 critically ill TBI patients. The somatotropic axis was assessed by stimulation with glucagon, and the cutoff of 5 ng/ml was selected as a normal response. Nine patients (18%) had GH deficiency. A recent study from our group enrolled 34 TBI patients. GH production was assessed by stimulation with growth hormone releasing hormone (GHRH). We showed that three patients (9%) had partial GH deficiency, defined by a peak GH level between 3 and 5 ng/ml [37].

Some studies have examined the correlation between GH response to provocative tests and prognosis or clinical outcome in the early post-TBI period. However, the reported results are conflicting. For example, it has been shown that the administration of GHRH in comatose TBI

**Table 3** Studies on anterior pituitary function in patients with nontraumatic brain injury (BI) during the period of critical illness (CBG corticosteroid binding-globulin, HPA hypothalamic pituitary adrenal, ICH intracerebral hemorrhage, ICP intracranial pressure, IS ischemic stroke, LT lactotropin, SAH subarachnoid hemorrhage, TH thyroid)

References	Type of BI	n	Axes tested	Main findings
Feibel et al. [20]	ICH	9	HPA	Cortisol levels depend on ICP and brainstem function
Savaridas et al. [39]	Aneurysmal SAH	6	HPA	High free cortisol, low CBG
Schwarz et al. [47]	IS	22	HPA, TH, LT	Profound endocrine changes, central regulation impaired
Dimopoulou et al. [48]	ICH	3	HPA	High incidence of impaired adrenal reserve, no association with outcome
	IS	17		
	Aneurysmal SAH	4		

survivors entails a significant increase in GH; in contrast, nonsurvivors had no such augmented GH levels [30]. In another investigation a paradoxical rise in GH after glucose loading was observed only in patients with more severe TBI [19]. A subsequent study showed a higher peak GH response to GHRH in patients who had a poor long-term outcome [35].

#### Gonadotropic-lactotrophic axes

TBI produces a profound decrease in testosterone along with low basal follicle-stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone which develops shortly after injury and deteriorates during the subsequent days [17, 22, 23, 24, 31]. The incidence of hypogonadism in critically ill TBI patients is variable, ranging from 24% to 80% [37, 38]. In a subset of patients testosterone levels normalize within 3–6 months after injury [24]. The magnitude of the decline in testosterone is correlated with head trauma severity in some studies [24, 37, 38] but not in others [22]. The pituitary-ovarian axis is comparably depressed [22].

Several studies attempted to elucidate the mechanisms of hypogonadism in TBI. Clark et al. [46] analyzed the pulse frequency and amplitude of luteinizing hormone in men and found that the former was normal whereas the latter was reduced. The authors concluded that a central dysfunction rather than primary gonadal impairment accounts for hypogonadism after TBI. They suggested that a possible explanation for the reduction in luteinizing hormone pulse amplitude is impaired delivery of gonadotropin-releasing hormone to the anterior pituitary as a consequence of increased intracranial pressure causing stalk compression. The hypothalamic etiology for hypogonadotropic hypogonadism is further supported by studies showing normal or exaggerated luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone responses to releasing factors [17, 22, 31, 37].

Prolactin (PRL) may increase [19, 21, 37, 38], remain normal [35], or decrease [31] in acute TBI. Baseline PRL is correlated with head trauma severity, as expressed by the Glasgow Coma Scale score [38] or the intracranial pressure levels [27]. The PRL responses to GHRH may be of prognostic significance; PRL is higher in TBI patients

with a favorable outcome than in those with a poor clinical course [35]. Furthermore, PRL responses to thyrotropin-releasing hormone (TRH) may reflect TBI severity; responses are attenuated in patients with severe head injury [21].

#### Thyroid axis

Thyroid dysfunction occurs following TBI at an incidence ranging from 4% to 15% [37, 38]. TSH may be normal [19, 26, 33] or low [17, 27, 35], triiodothyronine ( $T_3$ ) is low [17, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35] and total or free thyroxine ( $T_4$ ) may be normal [30, 35] or low [17, 25, 26, 29]. Reverse  $T_3$  usually increases [26, 29, 31, 33]. These findings suggest a low  $T_3$  and/or a low  $T_4$  syndrome. Changes in  $T_3$  and reverse  $T_3$  appear immediately after trauma [25] and can persist for at least 2 weeks [35]. Thyroid dysfunction has been shown to be reversible [17]. According to some studies basal thyroidal hormones reflect head trauma severity and predict outcome [17, 25, 26, 33]; thus patients with the greatest neurological dysfunction and a bad ultimate outcome have the lowest  $T_4$  and  $T_3$  levels [25]. However, others have failed to support these associations [35]. Dynamic testing may be of value in predicting clinical outcome; the TSH response after stimulation with TRH has been shown to be absent only in patients having a poor outcome [30, 35].

#### Anterior pituitary dysfunction in critically ill patients with nontraumatic BI

Pituitary function in critically ill patients with nontraumatic BI has received less systematic attention (Table 3) [20, 39, 47, 48].

#### Stroke (ischemic stroke and intracerebral hemorrhage)

Evidence that stroke is associated with endocrine dysfunction comes primarily from studies investigating noncritically ill patients with acute stroke. Most research has focused on HPA axis activity showing high cortisol

responses [49], disturbed diurnal cortisol rhythm [50], and reduced suppressibility of serum cortisol by dexamethasone [51]. Several other abnormalities have been reported, such as thyroid function suppression [52], hypogonadism [53, 54], and low insulin-like growth factor 1 [55].

Critically ill stroke patients may also experience hormonal dysfunction. A recent study evaluated 22 patients with acute space occupying hemispheric ischemic stroke on admission in the ICU and on days 3, 5, 7, and 9. Plasma levels of PRL, TSH, total and free T<sub>4</sub>, total T<sub>3</sub>, ACTH, and cortisol were measured; furthermore, on day 3 a TRH stimulation test was performed. The authors found abnormally low cortisol and ACTH concentrations, high PRL, and slightly suppressed thyroid function throughout the observation period. TRH stimulation of plasma TSH and PRL was low. The diurnal rhythm of cortisol was abolished [47]. Our group examined the HPA axis function in 20 critical care patients with stroke. We found that two patients had blunted cortisol responses following dynamic stimulation. Hypoadrenalinism was associated with a higher mortality rate, although it did not constitute an independent outcome predictor [48].

#### *Aneurysmal SAH*

The concept of SAH-induced hormonal alterations is supported by a study performed in noncritically ill patients with acute SAH. Baseline cortisol was high in all patients, gonadal hormones were within normal ranges, and hyperprolactinemia was present in 14%. Thyroid function abnormalities consisted of high TSH (14%), low T<sub>3</sub> (14%), and low T<sub>4</sub> (6%) [56]. Recent evidence suggests that hormonal abnormalities are frequent in long-term SAH survivors [57, 58, 59, 60], with GH or gonadal deficiencies predominating [57, 58, 60]. This pattern is similar to that in survivors of TBI, suggesting that GH and/or gonadotropin function is more fragile than the other axes, and that the pattern of endocrine abnormalities is unrelated to the type of BI [58, 61].

Data on hormonal changes in critically ill patients with aneurysmal SAH are sparse. A recent study investigated cortisol dynamics in six mechanically ventilated SAH patients. Total cortisol and corticosteroid-binding globulin were measured in the morning and evening, while free cortisol was calculated. In three patients the diurnal variation in total cortisol was abolished. All patients had total cortisol levels within the accepted reference range for nonstressed individuals. However, all patients had low corticosteroid-binding globulin and normal free cortisol. The authors concluded that critically ill SAH patients have no evidence of cortisol depletion [39].

#### **Posterior pituitary dysfunction in brain injury**

A normal function of the posterior pituitary is crucial for water homeostasis. Posterior pituitary dysfunction is a well-recognized complication of traumatic BI, but there are only scarce data in patients with SAH [62]. Inadequate antidiuretic hormone (ADH) secretion results in diabetes insipidus (DI). The most reliable data regarding the prevalence and natural course of posttraumatic DI have been published recently by Agha et al. [62]; they reported a prevalence of DI in the immediate period following TBI of 21.6%. In this series the occurrence of DI was related to the severity of the traumatic insult, but it was unrelated to the development of anterior pituitary abnormalities. In most cases posttraumatic DI was transient. A prospective study by Agha et al. [63] reported that 9 of 13 patients who had DI in the acute posttraumatic phase recovered by 6 months, and one additional patient recovered by 12 months. Interestingly, the majority of patients with permanent DI had only partial vasopressin deficiency.

Apart from hypernatremic dehydration induced by ADH deficiency, hyponatremia also develops in a substantial proportion of patients during the acute period of BI due to an inappropriate release of ADH (syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone, SIADH) as a result of damage to the pituitary stalk or the posterior pituitary. The reported prevalence of this abnormality varies from 2.3% to 36%. As a rule SIADH induced by TBI is transient [63].

#### *Clinical implications of pituitary function alterations in brain injury*

It has been stated that the importance of delineating pituitary function during the early phase of traumatic or nontraumatic BI is threefold: (a) to detect abnormalities that hamper recovery of these patients during the critical phase of their illness, (b) to obtain prognostic information for patients' morbidity and mortality rates, and (c) to diagnose pituitary hormone deficiencies that may persist later in life at an early stage.

#### *Pituitary function and impaired recovery*

As in other critical states, it is not clear whether hormone deficiencies discovered during the acute phase of BI are adaptive or detrimental [64]. Suppression of the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis may be appropriate to downregulate the production of anabolic androgens to conserve utilization of metabolic substrates by the less vital organs. On the other hand, loss of the sex steroids with their anabolic properties might be expected to affect wound healing and convalescence [65]. The changes in the thyroid axis have been interpreted as an attempt to

reduce energy expenditure and are generally believed to be adaptive for the individual [66]. Although not widely accepted [6, 61], some studies suggest that both gonadal and thyroid endocrine abnormalities are transient in critically ill TBI patients [17, 22, 23, 24]; thus it is questionable whether they should be treated. Similarly, the GH deficiency state observed during the acute phase in some patients with BI does not seem to require medical intervention. A large multicenter study showed that the administration of high doses of GH in critically ill patients, instead of improving outcome, doubled mortality [67]. Thus GH supplementation is not currently recommended during the acute phase of critical illness of any type. However, diminished GH secretion persisting later in life may be harmful since GH is beneficial on the net protein balance, bone mineral density, well-being, and cardiac and immune function [68].

In contrast, independently of its cause, the inability to mount an adequate cortisol response may increase the risk of death during severe illness, especially in patients with multiple organ failure and hemodynamic instability [10, 40]. On the other hand, no strict biochemical criteria for "normal" serum cortisol concentrations in critically ill patients are currently available [9, 10, 69]. Consequently, baseline or stimulated cortisol levels in deciding when to treat patients need further assessment. It should be noted that a recent large, randomized, placebo-control study showed that the early administration of pharmacological doses of methylprednisolone is not beneficial in patients with TBI injury. In fact this treatment was associated with a significant rise in risk of death within 2 weeks [70]. Therefore it is recommended that in the presence of clinically significant functional hypoadrenalinism only physiological doses of steroid replacement be applied.

The same is true for posterior pituitary dysfunction occurring as a result of BI. Untreated DI leads to polyuria. Since in the early post-TBI period water intake may be inadequate due to impaired cognition, polyuria can lead to hypernatremic dehydration with increased morbidity and impairment of recovery, a condition that is reversible with appropriate treatment with desmopressin and maintenance of fluid balance. Similarly, recognition and treatment of SIADH is important as hyponatremia increases the risk of cerebral edema and is associated with increased morbidity and mortality in BI patients.

#### *Pituitary function and prognosis*

The relevance of pituitary hormonal changes to patients' morbidity and mortality remains controversial. Some studies infer that basal hormones and/or hormonal responses to provocative tests serve as markers of head trauma severity. As a consequence such associations might be useful in establishing early prognosis in TBI patients. However, other studies have failed to confirm

these relationships. The relationship between pituitary dysfunction and long-term functional outcome is also controversial; one study showed that a good neurological recovery is more common in patients without hormonal abnormalities [13], while a recent investigation did not support this finding [61].

#### *Early detection of persistent pituitary function abnormalities*

A number of recent reports have examined the incidence and type of hormonal deficiencies in short or long-term survivors of BI. These studies suggest that subjects with a history of BI frequently develop pituitary dysfunction. The time-course of these anterior pituitary function abnormalities is currently unclear. One possibility is that these abnormalities occur in the early postinjury period; another possibility is that they appear progressively during the years following the acute insult. However, based on the data presented in this review pituitary dysfunction occurring in the early phase of BI consists of a mixture of pathophysiologically different changes. Thus most hormonal deficiencies observed during the early phase of BI follow the same course as in almost all critical states, and therefore it is difficult to discern a separate effect attributed to structural neuroendocrine damage. Even in those patients presenting with altered pituitary function tests during the early phase it is currently unclear whether these changes are permanent or reversible. Therefore and given the high prevalence of pituitary deficits in BI survivors it is strongly recommended that the management of these patients routinely include a complete neuroendocrine reevaluation at their recovery phase.

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#### **Conclusions**

In critically ill BI patients abnormal pituitary endocrine responses are due principally to hypothalamic changes. Several studies have examined the correlation between these hormonal alterations and BI severity, but the results are inconsistent. It remains currently unclear whether and how pituitary abnormalities adversely affect the clinical course of BI patients during the period of critical illness. With the exception of clinically significant relative adrenal deficiency and DI, the other endocrine alterations do not seem to require any therapeutic intervention in severely ill BI patients. It is also uncertain whether endocrine abnormalities detected in the early post-BI period persist for the rest of these patients' lives. In view of current evidence indicating a high incidence of pituitary dysfunction even years following BI it is recommended that repetition of endocrine evaluation be performed during the rehabilitation phase in all patients.

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## Matching total body oxygen consumption and delivery: a crucial objective?

**Abstract** The strength of the rationale for incorporating total body oxygen consumption ( $\text{VO}_2$ ) and delivery ( $\text{DO}_2$ ) into our decision making strategies contrasts with the absence of demonstrated benefits of bedside calculations in clinical practice. This situation mandates a careful reappraisal of the theoretical limitations of bedside calculations of  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$ , including a re-evaluation of the clinical situations in which these calculations are valid. Three levels of complexity can be distinguished when analysing a patient's hemodynamic status: 1) simple cases where investigations can be limited to clinical monitoring, including lactate changes over time; 2) intermediate situations requiring invasive investi-

gations in which continuous monitoring of  $\text{VO}_2$ -related variables such as cardiac output and mixed venous oxygen saturation often provide enough information to guide clinical decision; and 3) complex situations where assessment of  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  analysis might be recommended. Although studies that support such recommendations are limited they are based on a widely accepted physiological model.  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  analysis is also limited by theoretical and technical difficulties. In this article, we discuss the validity of these limitations in the bedside assessment of  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$ , and review data supporting the use of  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  analysis in the clinical evaluation of complex cases.

### Introduction

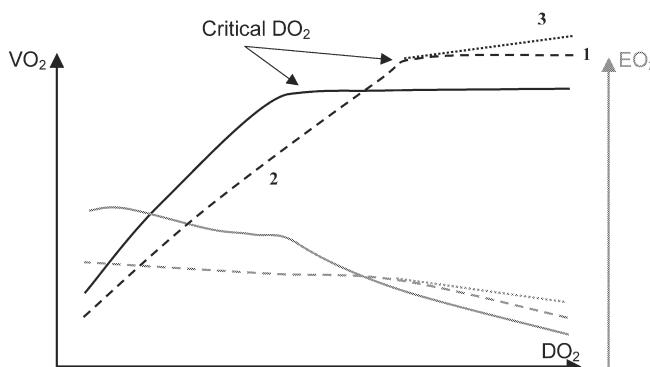
Regardless of the cause of shock, failure to rapidly restore adequate status leads to impaired mitochondrial  $\text{O}_2$  uptake and dysoxia. Significant  $\text{O}_2$  uptake due to nonoxidative systems may occur only when dysoxia has resolved, as these systems have lower affinity for oxygen than do oxidative systems [1, 2, 3]. A reasonable assumption therefore is that below a critical level,  $\text{VO}_2$  is inversely correlated to the risk of cell dysfunction and to the severity of shock. Once a substantial amount of cell necrosis has occurred, organ function recovery is not always possible even when an adequate  $\text{VO}_2$  is restored. In a large population of shock of various origins it has been shown that a  $\text{VO}_2$  value below that expected is the one most strongly related to death [4]. Thus early  $\text{VO}_2$  adaptation to tissue needs should be the major treatment

goal in patients with shock [5, 6]. The contrast between this strong rationale and the lack of consensus that bedside  $\text{VO}_2$  assessment is beneficial in practice mandates a careful reappraisal of our means to match  $\text{VO}_2$  and needs.

### The $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$ relationship

#### The physiological model

In both isolated cells [7, 8, 9] and whole organisms [10, 11, 12] a biphasic relationship between  $\text{O}_2$  use and resources has been established. When  $\text{DO}_2$  is higher than a threshold value,  $\text{VO}_2$  remains stable ( $\text{O}_2$  supply independency) because the  $\text{O}_2$  extraction rate of oxygen ( $\text{EO}_2=\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$ ) changes proportionally. When  $\text{DO}_2$  falls below this threshold, a proportional increase in  $\text{EO}_2$



**Fig. 1** Pathophysiological changes in the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship. Solid black line Normal relationship; dotted lines abnormal relationships 1 increased  $\text{VO}_2$  needs; 2 impaired  $\text{EO}_2$ ; 3 other mechanisms (see text). Gray curves Corresponding  $\text{EO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationships

cannot be maintained, and the  $\text{VO}_2$  linearly drops to zero ( $\text{O}_2$  supply dependency). The inflection point between the two slopes is accepted as indicating the critical level of  $\text{DO}_2$  (Fig. 1). The  $\text{O}_2$  supply dependency is associated with an increase in blood lactate concentration denoting possible activation of the anaerobic pathway [11, 13, 14, 15].

Assessment of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship is a theoretical means of evaluating the gap between actual  $\text{VO}_2$  and needed  $\text{VO}_2$ . A  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge can be performed easily at the bedside by increasing cardiac output (CO) [16], increasing low hemoglobin concentration (Hb) [11, 17], or increasing low  $\text{SaO}_2$  [18]. When  $\text{DO}_2$  increases, an increase in  $\text{VO}_2$  argues for inadequate  $\text{O}_2$  supply. In contrast, a stable  $\text{VO}_2$  value when  $\text{DO}_2$  increases suggests either that  $\text{VO}_2$  matches needs when associated with decreasing lactate levels [11, 13, 14, 15], or that  $\text{VO}_2$  is limited by other mechanisms than  $\text{O}_2$  supply, when associated with increasing lactate levels [19, 20, 21].

Although  $\text{VO}_2$  can be calculated by spirometry or indirect calorimetry, the reverse Fick method using a pulmonary artery catheter (PAC) is the most popular method for assessing the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship in clinical practice.  $\text{DO}_2$  is the arterial oxygen delivery calculated as the product of CO by arterial oxygen content ( $\text{CaO}_2$ ).  $\text{VO}_2$  can be calculated as the product of CO by the arteriovenous oxygen difference in oxygen contents ( $\text{Ca}-\text{vO}_2=\text{CaO}_2-\text{CvO}_2$ ).

#### “Patho-physiological” changes

Two mechanisms delay achievement of the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau and account for a rightward shift in the critical  $\text{DO}_2$  point (Fig. 1). When  $\text{VO}_2$  needs are excessive (uncoupling and/or increased metabolic activity), the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau is reached at a higher level of  $\text{VO}_2$  [22, 23]. When  $\text{O}_2$  tissue

diffusion is impaired (impaired microcirculation and/or impaired  $\text{O}_2$  mitochondrial use), the slope of the dependent part of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship is decreased [24, 25, 26].

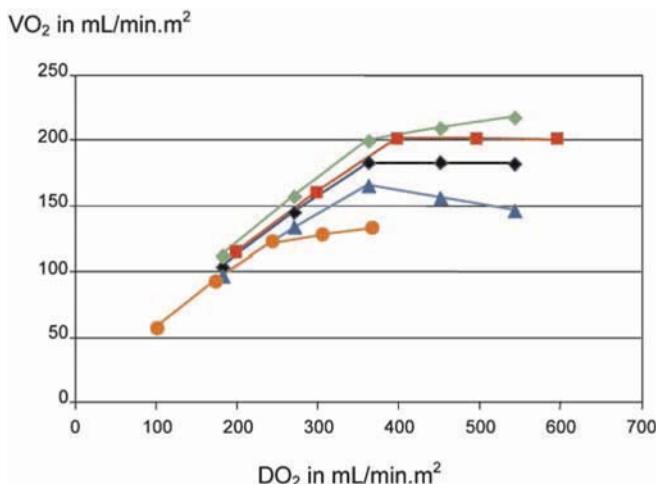
Three other mechanisms result in an increase in  $\text{VO}_2$  as  $\text{DO}_2$  increases beyond the critical point, so that a slight upward slope, usually of less than 5%, replaces the expected  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau. Although more difficult, identification of the critical  $\text{DO}_2$  inflection point remains possible when these mechanisms are operative, because the slope of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency segment ranges from 20% to 50% [27]. The first mechanism occurs during a  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge involving an increase in CO because the  $\text{VO}_2$  needs of kidneys [28], stomach [29], and muscle [30] increase in direct proportion to flow. Furthermore, infusion of inotropic agents increases myocardial  $\text{O}_2$  consumption [11, 15, 27]. Another mechanism is additional oxygen uptake due to nonmitochondrial oxidase systems when dysoxia has resolved [1, 31]. The last mechanism, conformance, is a decrease in the cells' metabolic needs in response to a gradual decline in available  $\text{O}_2$ . Although secondary to a chronic change, this phenomenon has been observed in acute situations [32], and recovery from conformance may account for progressive increase in metabolic needs [33].

#### The spurious “pathological” supply dependency

A controversy arose in the 1980s from several studies on the acute respiratory distress syndrome and/or sepsis in which the expected  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau was not observed in patients who were recovering from shock and had high  $\text{DO}_2$  values [34, 35, 36, 37]. This was interpreted as evidence of “pathological  $\text{O}_2$  supply dependency” possibly related to a hidden oxygen deficit contributing to multi-organ failure and death. However, increasing  $\text{DO}_2$  to supranormal values was beneficial in some studies [38, 39, 40, 41] but not in others [42, 43]. Furthermore, it has been suggested this so-called “pathological supply dependency” results from spurious upsloping of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship due to mathematical coupling of measurement errors when using a PAC because in some studies simultaneous and independent assessments of  $\text{VO}_2$  demonstrated a plateau [12, 44, 45, 46].

#### Methodological limitations of $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$ relationship assessment

The formulas of  $\text{VO}_2=\text{CO}\times[\text{Hb}\times1.36\times(\text{SaO}_2-\text{SvO}_2)]$  and  $\text{DO}_2=\text{CO}\times\text{SaO}_2\times\text{Hb}\times1.36$ , where blood gases are neglected, shows that  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  share three variables: Hb,  $\text{SaO}_2$ , and CO (plus height and weight if CO is indexed). It is therefore necessary to study the impact of these shared variables on the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship.



**Fig. 2** Effect of systematic errors in the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship. Black curve A hypothetical patient. The critical  $\text{DO}_2$  is reached at the third point. Red curve Systematic 10% overestimation of CO, Hb, or  $\text{CvO}_2$ ; blue curve systematic 10% overestimation of  $\text{SvO}_2$  with no error in  $\text{SaO}_2$ ; green curve systematic 10% underestimation of  $\text{SvO}_2$  with no error in  $\text{SaO}_2$ ; orange curve 0.5 l/min absolute underestimation of CO

#### Systematic measurement errors

Systematic relative errors in Hb, CO, height, or weight measurements do not modify the shape of the curve because all points are changed proportionally (Fig. 2). Even if  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  values are over- or underestimated, the critical  $\text{DO}_2$  is identified at the same moment during a  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge. From the formulae it is easy to understand that the shape of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship can only change when there is an absolute error in CO (with upsloping of the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau when CO is underestimated), or when errors of different magnitude occur in  $\text{SvO}_2$  and  $\text{SaO}_2$  values (with upsloping of the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau when  $\text{SvO}_2$  is selectively underestimated or  $\text{SaO}_2$  selectively overestimated).

Most sources of CO error such as tricuspid regurgitation and left-to-right shunting are more likely to create a relative systematic error [47]. The most likely systematic source of absolute underestimation of CO is underestimation of left ventricle output related to the fact that the bronchial circulation is disregarded when  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  are calculated from right ventricular output. Bronchial blood flow may increase by 200% in injured lungs [48]. We can speculate that the magnitude of the error is relatively constant and dependent on lung injury severity and on lung oxygen consumption. However, even when lung oxygen consumption reaches 20% of the total  $\text{VO}_2$ , the spurious slope ranges from 4% to 6%.

Absolute underestimation of  $\text{SvO}_2$  as compared to  $\text{SaO}_2$  is possible only if venous sampling is repeatedly flawed, which can occur in practice only when  $\text{HbO}_2$  saturation is not measured but calculated from  $\text{PO}_2$  [49].

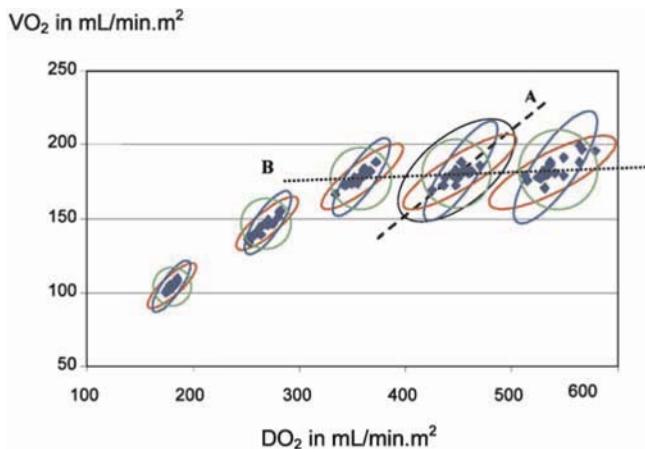
Aspiration of capillary blood when mixed venous blood is sampled too quickly or with an inflated balloon leads to  $\text{CvO}_2$  overestimation with a downsloping  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau.

#### Random measurement errors

In clinical practice, when all analyzers are properly calibrated, random error is the most likely type of error. Although the combined variability of within-patient, between-patient, between-device, and between-day measurements may be large, it is of no assistance for estimating the effect of random errors on the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship determined using one device on one day in one patient. Within-patient variability ( $S_d$ ) is much smaller. Here we consider the 95% confidence interval (95%CI, which is  $\pm 2S_d$ ) for  $S_d$ . The  $S_d$  value for hemodynamic variables should be reassessed in the light of recent changes in devices. With current continuous CO calculators, variability is lower than previously reported [44, 50, 51] because there is no manual intervention and because more than three measurements are averaged. We assume a mean error of 0 and a 95%CI of 10% [52]. The 95%CI of hemoglobin measurements can been estimated at 2% [53], and the 95%CI of  $\text{HbO}_2$  saturation at 4% [54]. The global impact of these random errors on  $\text{VO}_2$  is 18% (range -9 to +9%). This 95%CI obtained using PAC is close to values obtained when  $\text{VO}_2$  is assessed by indirect calorimetry (95%CI=10%, range [-7 to +3%] [55]. Then random measurement errors may affect absolute values of variables but the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau starts at the same point of the  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge as for exact values (Fig. 3). Therefore the clinical conclusion remains the same.

#### Mathematical coupling of data

Archie [56] emphasized mathematical coupling of data when the relationship between two variables having one or more common components is being assessed. Caution is required in distinguishing between "mathematical" coupling and "other" couplings. All biological variables coming from the same patient may be dependent on one another due to overt or hidden couplings. Any pertinent information provided by two variables derives exclusively from their (a) mean, (b) variability, and (c) associative function. Thus mathematical coupling, if present, is a classical form of the relationship between two conventional variables. It remains worthwhile to study the relationship between two variables if the underlying medical question makes sense, regardless of whether coupling is clearly present.



**Fig. 3** Mathematical coupling in the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship. *Black* points show 20 examples of the effect of random errors in our hypothetical experiment assuming a 95%CI of 10%, 2%, and 4% for CO, Hb, and  $\text{SaO}_2$  measurements, respectively. The biphasic shape of the curve remains easy to identify. In the *red*, *blue*, and *green* areas the 95%CI of measured values increased to 20% for CO (or Hb), 10% for  $\text{SaO}_2$ , and 10% for  $\text{SvO}_2$ , respectively. *A* Global area and slope of mathematical coupling of all random errors. *B* Slope of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship

#### Mathematical coupling of random measurement errors

In contrast, mathematical coupling of measurement errors supplies no information of interest [6, 46, 57, 58]. When  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  are calculated from the same values of CO, Hb, and  $\text{SaO}_2$ , mathematical coupling of random error for each common variable linearly extends the dispersion of each  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  point. The slope of each axis of variation depends on the associative functions between variables: 0.33 for CO, 1 for  $\text{SaO}_2$ , and 0 for  $\text{SvO}_2$  because this is not a common variable. The combination of random errors for all components therefore creates an area of dispersion around the correct value that combines all specific variable axes (Fig. 3). Depending on the magnitude of possible error in each common variable, the global slope usually varies from 0.25 to 0.50. This global slope determines the statistical area of dispersion of measured values around the correct value of a single  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  point (slope A in Fig. 3). It should not be confused with the slope of the plateau joining two consecutive points (slope B in Fig. 3), for which the probabilities of upward shifting and of downward shifting are similar.

These probabilities are similar but not exactly equal because the areas of dispersion around the exact value slope upwards and enlarge when  $\text{DO}_2$  increases. Therefore the average B slope of many experiments is expected to be slightly positive. Calculation of a reliability coefficient ( $R_D$ ) allows appropriate weighting of this slope and recalculation of the true relationship [57, 58]. Figure 3 provides an intuitive understanding of what  $R_D$  means. When the distance between two points increases

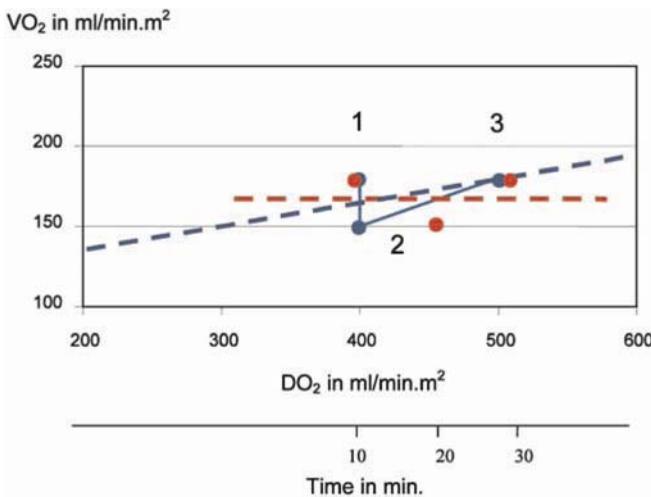
(large  $\text{DO}_2$  range) and when measurement variability decreases (small area of distribution),  $R_D$  tends to one and the impact of mathematical coupling of measurement errors tends to zero.

The final impact of mathematical coupling varies across experiments but can be very low. Using very large measurement errors, Stratton et al. [58] calculated that the impact of measurement errors (random effect plus mathematical coupling) on a  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau gave an averaged slope of  $0.06 \pm 0.05$ . This variability may account for a spurious slope between  $-0.04$  and  $+0.16$  [59, 60], in keeping with published studies [12, 44, 45, 46]. However, if this simulation were performed using the actual best variability, as shown in our hypothetical patient, the mean slope of the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau would be  $0.007 \pm 0.05$ . This variability may account for a spurious slope between  $-0.10$  and  $+0.10$ . The mathematical coupling of error is then negligible compared with the effect of random errors.

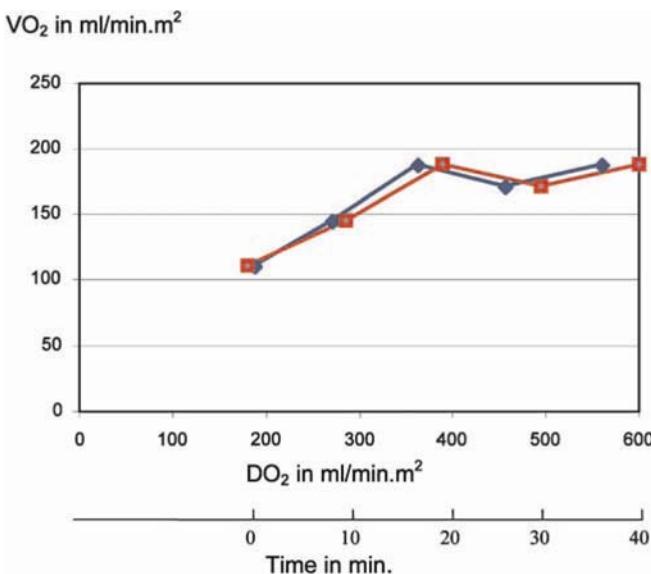
#### The use of empirical regression models

It thus makes sense to plot  $\text{VO}_2$  against  $\text{DO}_2$  to identify the critical  $\text{DO}_2$  value in a specific situation. Obtaining more than two measurements can smooth the curve [59, 60]. However, the use of linear regression to calculate the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  slope raises several concerns. It is not possible to use simple models to characterize the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship when the well-established physiological model predicts a biphasic curve [37]. Testing two different regression models to identify the biphasic shape of the curve requires that the inflection point be identified. The best pair of equations could be determined by testing all possible pairs of equations for all possible inflection points and by selecting the best pair of equations based on its minimum sum of residual sums of squares [61, 62].

Another concern arises because linear regression analyses are based on the minimum sum of squared residuals. The residual is the difference, for each  $x$  value, between observed and calculated  $y$  values on the  $x$ -axis. Therefore this model assumes that  $x$  values are correct (independent variable), or at least that the error on the  $x$ -axis is small compared to the error on the  $y$ -axis. This prerequisite is not met for the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship even when  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  are measured independently. This is another source of spurious upsloping (Fig. 4). Because  $\text{DO}_2$  is presumed to increase proportionally with time during a  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge, using time as the actual independent variable is more appropriate (Figs. 4, 5). Additionally, the error in  $\text{VO}_2$  is usually proportional to the  $\text{VO}_2$  value; therefore the residuals of the regression line are not randomly distributed. Thus, when analyzing a family of regression lines from several patients, a more appropriate approach is a weighted linear regression model that also allows handling of between-patient variability [44, 63].



**Fig. 4** Spurious upsloping due to an error in  $\text{DO}_2$ . Points 1, 2, and 3 Three successive points of a  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  plateau with a measurement error in point 2. The regression line between these three points shows a positive relationship (blue dotted line). This does not take into account the fact that during a  $\text{DO}_2$  challenge  $\text{DO}_2$  is expected to increase steadily. When time is used as the independent variable, the relationship is flat (red dotted line)



**Fig. 5** Combination of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship and of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{time}$  relationship in one random experiment in our hypothetical model, using the same random errors as in Fig. 3. For this figure  $\text{DO}_2$  increased linearly with time. This helps to identify the critical  $\text{VO}_2$  point and eliminates the possible effect of mathematical coupling of error

#### The impact of pooling data

Some studies of goal-oriented strategies for improving  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  found no improvement in survival but pooled patients with different disease processes, different

metabolic needs, and different stages of shock [42, 43]. In contrast, the strategies were successful in studies investigating only postoperative surgical patients [18, 39, 41, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68], or patients who had a variety of diseases but were all included at the very early stage of shock [23, 69, 70]. Thus, the most conspicuous difference between studies that did and did not find better survival is heterogeneity vs. homogeneity of circulatory disorder characteristics in the study populations [71].

Analysis of the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship on pooled data from several patients is also likely to show a spurious positive slope, for three reasons. Firstly, a large increase in mathematical coupling of errors is expected because the coefficient of variation for each measurement increases due to variability across patients, devices, and days [57]. Secondly, pooled data are likely to come from a mix of patients with inadequate resuscitation, adequate resuscitation, and relapsing shock. Thus with pooled data a substantial proportion of patients may have hidden dysoxia with physiological  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency. Thirdly, pooled data are also likely to come from patients with different metabolic needs. After circulatory shock critical  $\text{DO}_2$  may vary from 8 to 21 ml/kg depending on the cause of the shock [22, 62, 72]. Even in comparable patients, differences in oxygen deficits, sedation, and/or activities may account for substantial differences in metabolic needs [73]. Therefore even if all patients are adequately resuscitated, analysis of pooled data from different levels of the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau results in a slope without any relevance. Thus it is more appropriate to average the slopes of each individual patient [44, 46].

#### Other means for matching $\text{VO}_2$ and needs

Although most of the limitations to the  $\text{DO}_2/\text{VO}_2$  relationship can be corrected and/or optimized, matching  $\text{VO}_2$  and needs by ensuring that a  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau has been reached remains difficult. Considerable effort has been expended to develop alternatives. Three levels of clinical complexity can be distinguished.

- Clinical improvement is a good indicator of adequate resuscitation [74]. In practice,  $\text{VO}_2$  needs are usually met by decreasing metabolic needs, optimizing the hematocrit and  $\text{SaO}_2$  level, and increasing blood flow empirically, until the clinical status improves. This situation does not require invasive hemodynamic investigations. A clear improvement in blood lactate clearance is also a good, minimally invasive, indicator of adequate resuscitation [74]. The blood lactate concentration alone fails to discriminate between dysoxia and aerobiosis [75, 76]. Although more reliable [4, 74, 77, 78], the time course of lactate levels is not an ideal marker. Lactate limitations have been recently reviewed by De Backer [76]. Diabetes mellitus, liver dysfunction, tissue reperfusion, catecholamine infusion, cellular metabolic alter-

ations, and inhibition of pyruvate dehydrogenase can result in a marked increase in blood lactate concentrations despite an improvement in tissue dysoxia. In these more complex situations where a clear clinical improvement and a normalization of blood lactate cannot be obtained, an evaluation of the adequacy of tissue oxygenation is required.

2) Some investigators have recommended that  $\text{DO}_2$  be increased to supranormal values, greater than the usual critical level, without paying much attention to  $\text{VO}_2$ . This simplification of the method based on the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship was associated with favorable outcomes in homogeneous population of high-risk surgery patients [18, 39, 41, 64, 67, 79], cardiogenic shock following myocardial infarction [69], and acute respiratory failure [23, 60] but failed to verify beneficial effects after onset of organ failure [67], or when different causes of shock were pooled [23, 60]. Other studies argue that sequential  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  calculations can be advantageously replaced by continuous measurement of  $\text{CO}$  [80] and/or  $\text{SvO}_2$  [81]. More recently a clinical algorithm including  $\text{ScvO}_2$  monitoring in patients with sepsis was shown to be clinically beneficial [70]. The use of these variables allows continuous comparison between measured values and targeted values.

However, targeting a preestablished value for  $\text{DO}_2$ ,  $\text{CO}$ , or  $\text{SvO}_2$  does not prove that these values meet the needs of an individual patient [22]. These preestablished targets are derived from normal findings or from survivors in selected populations of patients. The determination of the needed value of one given variable must take into consideration the limitation of other variables which are specific to the patient, his past history, the actual pathological event, the delay before onset of shock, and often the recent therapeutic interventions. Intuitive evaluation of the needed value for each variable in each specific case requires considerable expertise. Misinterpretation of PAC-related information and heterogeneity in the medical decision process is frequent [42, 43]. Even for experts the intuitive evaluation of needs may be subject to errors [22]. In some conditions, such as coronary disease, efforts to increase  $\text{CO}$  to "normalize" the cardiac index to more than  $2.5 \text{ l min}^{-1} \text{ m}^{-2}$  or the  $\text{SvO}_2$  value to more than 70% can be harmful. In addition, there is some evidence that an excessive  $\text{O}_2$  supply may be deleterious, either via the useless metabolic cost of an excessive increase in  $\text{DO}_2$  or via activation of nonoxidative systems. Failure to consider the latter two mechanisms may also explain the poor results obtained in studies targeting nonspecific "supranormal" values of  $\text{DO}_2$  in heterogeneous populations of patients [42, 43]. Thus treatment efforts should be limited to what is necessary (not less but not more).

3. All hemodynamic variables are interrelated, and the  $\text{VO}_2$  value is the final result. Ensuring that  $\text{VO}_2$  meets tissue needs is the best means of ensuring that global hemodynamic status is adequate [4].  $\text{VO}_2$ , whether cal-

culated by spirometry, indirect calorimetry, or using a PAC, is equal to needs when a plateau is reached in the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship. No other relationship between two variables allows a clear identification of an inflection point between anaerobiosis and aerobiosis. The shape of the  $\text{CO}/\text{SvO}_2$  relationship or the  $\text{CO}/\text{EO}_2$  relationship is bi-curvilinear and similar to the  $\text{DO}_2/\text{EO}_2$  relationship shown in Fig. 1. The inflexion point is much more difficult to identify.

Needs can also be estimated as the sum of  $\text{VO}_2$  at basal metabolism, as indicated by age- and gender-specific normative data, and of other metabolic needs, as evaluated roughly based on a number of factors such as body temperature, which changes  $\text{VO}_2$  needs by  $\pm 13\%$  for each degree above or below  $37^\circ\text{C}$ . Depending on metabolic conditions,  $\text{VO}_2$  needs usually vary from 0.7- to 3-fold of basal metabolism. The two latter methods can be combined. When the  $\text{VO}_2$  plateau is reached at a value close to the estimated value, the patient's needs are probably met. Handling the large amount of information required to assess  $\text{O}_2$  needs can be difficult [82, 83, 84], and computer assistance may be helpful (<http://www.hemodyn.com>) [4, 85].

## Practical implications

The rationale for incorporating the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationship in our clinical management strategies is confirmed by several studies in which most of the limiting factors listed above were avoided [19, 20, 21]. In contrast, the chances of survival are very small in patients whose  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  fail to increase with treatment despite evidence of an oxygen deficit [19, 20, 21]. Thus, reaching the critical  $\text{DO}_2$  ensuring that  $\text{VO}_2$  needs are met is a crucial objective even if these two variables are calculated or intuitively estimated. To increase the likelihood of identifying clinical benefits related to bedside  $\text{VO}_2$ -guided therapy we suggest a number of practical guidelines.

### Selection of early stage of shock states

Shock responds better to hemodynamic resuscitation in the early stages [70]. Although the final objective is to provide enough oxygen to each cell, there is some evidence that rapidly achieving a sufficient total body  $\text{VO}_2$  is a prerequisite. Late-stage shock is a far more complex situation involving not only the macro- and microcirculation but also cell metabolism and the consequences of cell necrosis, which cannot be corrected by hemodynamic resuscitation alone.

### Matching VO<sub>2</sub> with needs is the first objective

In most situations targeting a clinical improvement, a decrease in lactate level, or a preestablished value for CO or SvO<sub>2</sub> or both is an acceptable means of intuitively reaching an adequate VO<sub>2</sub>. In complex situations, by plotting VO<sub>2</sub>/DO<sub>2</sub> over time during a DO<sub>2</sub> challenge, the critical DO<sub>2</sub> value can be evaluated rapidly as the inflection area on the curve, and resuscitation efforts can then be limited to what is necessary. Because the critical DO<sub>2</sub> value can be determined visually with a 95%CI of 20%, it is reasonable to limit DO<sub>2</sub> to its observed critical value +20%. When lactate remains high despite evidence that a VO<sub>2</sub> plateau has been reached, there is no argument that increasing DO<sub>2</sub> further is beneficial [19, 20, 21]. Continuous efforts to decrease O<sub>2</sub> demand and to improve the microcirculation may be more appropriate [86, 87]. Combined analysis of the VO<sub>2</sub>/DO<sub>2</sub> and VO<sub>2</sub>/time relationships provide the most useful means of eliminating the effects of mathematical coupling of errors and the theoretical limitations due to DO<sub>2</sub> variability in the regression line derivations. A mild upsloping of the VO<sub>2</sub> plateau (slope <10%) should not be confounded with O<sub>2</sub> dependency. When necessary, the critical DO<sub>2</sub> point can be determined more accurately using the method developed by John-Alder and Bennet [61].

To reach this objective the best compromise must be identified, based on metabolic cost

In the case of persistent O<sub>2</sub> supply dependency the first way to match VO<sub>2</sub> and needs is to decrease the needs. Hyperthermia, acute respiratory failure, and/or pain increase VO<sub>2</sub> needs sharply. Antipyretic drugs [88], sedation [89], and mechanical ventilation [90] often produce a

50% decrease in VO<sub>2</sub> needs. This has exactly the same favorable effect as doubling the CO or doubling the EO<sub>2</sub>.

When VO<sub>2</sub> needs have been lowered as much as possible, because VO<sub>2</sub>=EO<sub>2</sub>×DO<sub>2</sub>, matching VO<sub>2</sub> and needs implies to increase EO<sub>2</sub> or DO<sub>2</sub>. Improving EO<sub>2</sub> must be always considered first, although this rarely produces a rapid VO<sub>2</sub> increase. Treating infection, excessive sedation, or excessive water retention, for example, may increase EO<sub>2</sub> [70]. Finally, when the only possibility is to increase DO<sub>2</sub>, clinicians must choose among various means that presumably differ in their caloric effects. Arterial vasodilatation improves DO<sub>2</sub> and decreases myocardial O<sub>2</sub> requirements. In contrast, inotropic agents and vasoconstrictors have major caloric effects. Whatever the method used, a metabolic price must be paid for improving VO<sub>2</sub> and DO<sub>2</sub> to the critical values. This metabolic cost (a part of the total VO<sub>2</sub> requirement) must also be limited to what is strictly necessary.

### Conclusion

Whereas there is a strong rationale for incorporating VO<sub>2</sub> into our early goal-oriented management strategies, proof that this improves patient survival is lacking. However, this should not lead to discontinuation of bedside VO<sub>2</sub> assessment, because no studies have been designed specifically to evaluate the potential benefits of rapidly increasing VO<sub>2</sub> to the specific value required by each individual patient at a given point in time. The present review is a call for such a study.

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## Normalizing physiological variables in acute illness: five reasons for caution

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### Introduction

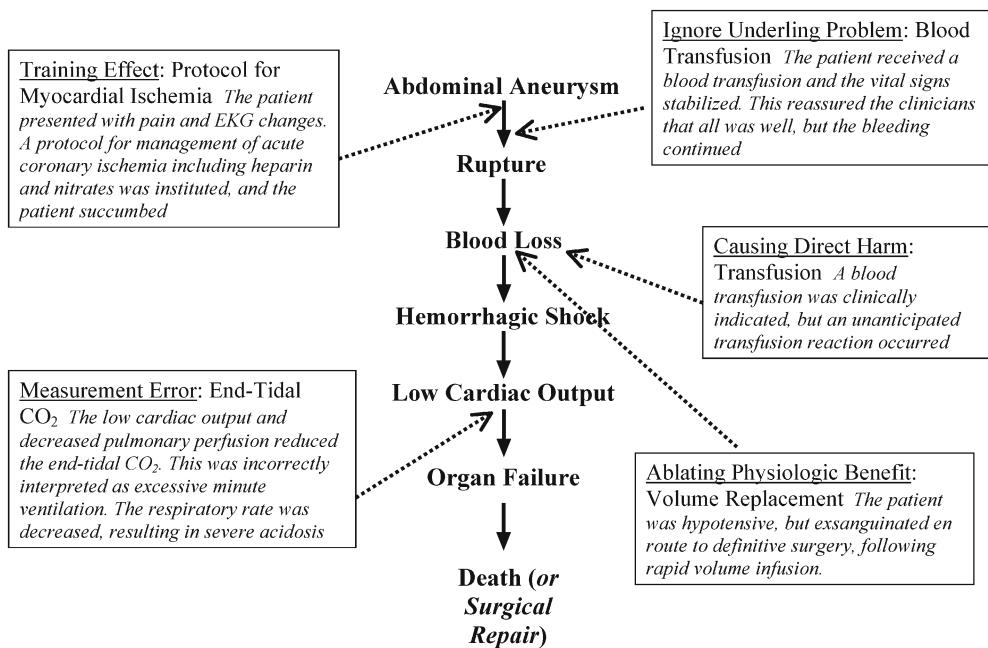
Acute illness is accompanied by the development of abnormal physiology. The development and severity of illness, as well as recovery, is paralleled by changes in the physiological variables that clinicians commonly monitor. Several factors may prompt clinicians to address and treat the variables in isolation from addressing the underlying disease. This article explores why clinicians may target and attempt to normalize abnormal physiological variables and identifies five reasons why such an approach can be hazardous.

### Physiological parameters and illness

The evolution of many illnesses usually follows predictable patterns. For example, septic shock, an acute syndrome that is perhaps emblematic of critical care medicine and has a high mortality, commonly follows a foreseeable trajectory from localized to generalized infection, progressive hemodynamic deterioration, multiple organ dysfunction and, in over 30% of patients, death [1]. The cardiovascular changes associated with this syndrome typically include tachycardia and decreased blood pressure and usually an increase in cardiac output.

There are several reasons why clinicians monitor and attempt to correct such physiological variables in the acutely ill. First, in some highly specific situations this approach appears to work. Indeed, although seriously questioned [2, 3], randomized controlled clinical trials have suggested improvement in survival associated with rigorous control of plasma glucose in postoperative adult cardiac surgical patients [4] or more rapid resuscitation of patients with recently diagnosed septic shock [1]. Second, traditionally physiology has been the basis for assessment and treatment in critically ill patients, where monitoring directs how therapy is applied [5]. Although ongoing developments of molecular medicine and evidence-based medicine may alter how patients are treated in the future, the “physiological” approach, i.e., treatment based on physiological monitoring, has been a cornerstone of teaching in critical care medicine for decades [6]. Third, the extent to which physiological variables differ from normal values indicates how ill the patient is. This is important because clinicians know well that disease severity is an important indicator of ultimate outcome, and the assessment of severity is largely based on the degree to which the measured variables (e.g., perturbations of the cardiovascular, respiratory, and acid-base systems) differ from normal values. Indeed such impressions have been validated by numerous scoring systems that incorporate the extent of physiological derangement and predict outcomes

**Fig. 1** An example of an acute illness state: hemorrhagic shock resulting from a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm. This flowchart illustrates how, using the five identified erroneous approaches, clinicians may intervene but direct therapy inappropriately



in populations of critically ill adults [7, 8] and children [9]. Fourth, beyond linking the initial degree of physiological derangement with severity of illness at the outset, established data have documented a close association between the sequential changes in physiological abnormalities and prognosis from acute illness [10]. Finally, in the same way that increasing deviation of variables from normal values reflects worsening of disease and poor prognosis, the converse is also true; normalization of abnormal variables parallels disease resolution and may be the principal objective evidence that a patient's condition is improving.

Despite this rationale the approach is imperfect and sometimes has disastrous results. A recent randomized controlled trial of nitric oxide synthase inhibition in septic shock was designed with simple pathophysiological rationale [11]; although the drug was effective in correcting the blood pressure and reversing shock [12], mortality was increased, not decreased [11]. Indeed, more comprehensive consideration, including attention to the critical importance of myocardial function in sepsis, might have predicted such a response [13, 14]. This vivid example illustrates the need for reflection about simplistic physiological rationale vs. demonstration of actual outcome benefit, and the potential for error associated with the former.

### Normalization as a therapeutic endpoint

Based on the above considerations it is understandable why clinicians would instinctively focus on attempting to normalize abnormal physiological variables in patients who are acutely ill. Although several studies have demonstrated adverse effects of increasing levels of physio-

logical support to supranormal levels (e.g., oxygen delivery [15], endocrine replacement [16]), clinicians may not appreciate dangers that may be associated with adjustment of variables to normal levels. We outline in this contribution five principles by which targeting and attempting to normalize physiological variables in acutely ill patients can lead to harm. These principles are illustrated by published examples and suggest global approaches for avoidance of such complications. An illustrated outline is provided in Fig. 1, focusing on the potential harm associated with correcting variables in a patient with ruptured abdominal aneurysm.

### Ignoring the underlying problem

Classical approaches to treating acute illness involve provision of supportive care while at the same time addressing the primary problem. There are clearly some derangements in physiological variables, for example, severe hypoxemia, which are inherently life-threatening and must therefore be immediately treated. However, the clinician cannot be content with the return of measured variables to normal but must consider the underlying cause of the derangement. Failure to do so can result in significant harm to the patient.

Consider a patient presenting with severe hypovolemic shock from a massive gastrointestinal hemorrhage. Initial management may include fluids, blood products, and potentially vasopressors. It is gratifying to see the blood pressure climb to normal levels with the supportive care. It would be catastrophic, however, if one did not continue with definitive management of the bleeding. Similarly, a

patient with pyonephrosis from an obstructed ureter could develop septic shock and all the physiological derangements that occur with multiorgan dysfunction. The variables can look much better with usual critical care support (e.g., mechanical ventilation, fluids, vasopressors), but the patient is unlikely to improve overall without appropriate abscess drainage. In both situations it is obvious that the management of the patient requires both supportive care in addition to measures directed at the underlying cause.

Consider also each individual parameter monitored in the critical care unit. Derangements in any variable can have a myriad of causes. For example, pulse oximetry may inform the clinician about a potentially important change in a key physiological parameter, oxygen saturation. Desaturation can have any of numerous underlying causes, each requiring specific therapy. Such concerns are reflected in an editorial commentary on the intraoperative use of pulse oximetry wherein Fairley [17] wrote, "As the blindfolded anesthetist walks unknowingly towards the cliff of hypoxia.... the protective hand of the pulse oximeter sentry stops him from falling over the edge. The oximeter will not tell him why.... or the direction back."

### **Inducing harm**

It has long seemed logical to clinicians that in acutely ill patients the restoration of vital functions to normal levels would result in reduced imposition on the physiological reserve and increase the probability, and the rapidity, of recovery [18]. In terms of transfusion of red blood cells, the rationale—representing conventional thinking up to 5 years ago—was that the increased O<sub>2</sub> delivery to tissues resulting from transfusion would permit greater O<sub>2</sub> consumption at the cellular level, and that this would translate into better outcome. Although simplistic, such concepts have long provided the impetus for "topping up" hemoglobin levels in acutely ill patients [19, 20].

In fact, this specific intervention—red cell transfusion—has been subjected to several important clinical studies, with unexpected results [21, 22]. To test the acute effects of red cell transfusion on tissue oxygenation, Marik and Sibbald [21] transfused patients suffering from systemic sepsis who were mildly anemic. Several important lessons were learned. First, global O<sub>2</sub> consumption was not increased when directly measured, despite indirect estimation suggesting the contrary. Second, at a local tissue level the majority of the transfusions resulted in adverse, not beneficial, changes in the oxygenation status. This was detected using gastric tonometry, a technique that assesses the O<sub>2</sub> supply-demand status of the vulnerable mucosal cells that line the stomach. In addition, the age of the transfused red cells was predictive of the degree of mucosal dysoxia, raising the possibility that storage duration, well within ranges common in North America, resulted in dysfunctional red cells.

While the pathophysiological responses to stored red cells are of mechanistic interest, a subsequent clinical study has provided important outcome data that may mandate changes in practice [22]. This study demonstrated that transfusion, even to a modest hemoglobin concentration, does not improve the status of anemic patients who are acutely ill in the intensive care unit; in fact subgroup analysis suggests that it may increase mortality [22], perhaps due to leukocyte-mediated actions [23] or altered volume status. Other examples exist where treatment aimed at normalizing variables can result in adverse outcome. For example, rapid correction of serum sodium concentration in cases of hyponatremia can result in brainstem destruction from central pontine myelinolysis [24]; conversely, rapid normalization of hyperosmolar states, such as a hyperosmolar coma and diabetic ketoacidosis, can result in accelerated cerebral edema, with devastating consequences. In preterm infants the targeting of normal, not high, levels of oxygenation with low amounts of supplemental O<sub>2</sub> was hypothesized to improve neurodevelopment [25]. The hypothesis, although apparently soundly constructed, turned out to be false [25], and the approach instead of helping caused harm, resulting in an increased incidence of chronic lung disease. Finally, it is now apparent that the high tidal volumes associated with frankly lowered PaCO<sub>2</sub> towards or below normal levels in patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) are associated with increased mortality [26, 27, 28]; indeed alternative approaches to management of ARDS have been proposed [29, 30].

### **Ablation of physiological benefit**

Whereas abnormal physiological variables always suggest an abnormal milieu or disease state, this does not mean that all abnormal variables are directly causing harm. Indeed, in some situations abnormal variables (e.g., mild hypotension) may benefit the patient.

Resuscitation of trauma victims who have developed hypotension due to blood loss has traditionally followed the "A, B, C" (i.e., airway, breathing, circulation) approach [31, 32]. In this scenario the patient's airway is controlled, breathing assured, and the depleted circulating volume is restored, all in rapid succession. However, the idea that circulating volume should be rapidly restored has undergone reevaluation during the past decade. Indeed, a randomized controlled trial in hypotensive trauma patients suggested that delayed correction of depleted circulating volume, as compared with the traditional immediate correction, leads to superior outcome in terms of survival and duration of hospital stay [33].

How could such an approach be beneficial? The results of that study suggest that hypotension in such a population [33], although reflecting severe depletion of circulating volume, is in fact protective because it reduces the

propensity for ongoing bleeding. The idea is supported by direct experimental evidence [34, 35]. Thus although it is not suggested that prolonged or severe hypotension is beneficial per se, or is even sustainable, the data do indicate that rapid volume correction without first attending to the sources of bleeding may be associated with elevated systemic blood pressure, reinitiating or increasing blood loss, and escalating the risk of death from hemorrhage [33]. Thus in this specific context and perhaps in others, for example, ruptured aortic aneurysm, temporary hypotension is protective.

There are other examples whereby an abnormal parameter is protective. It has been suggested that acidemia, the presence of a pH in the extracellular fluid that is lower than normal, may protect against the ongoing production of endogenous organic acids such as lactic and keto acids [36] as well as augmenting release of oxygen from hemoglobin [37, 38]. In diabetic ketoacidosis the standard approach is to provide insulin and careful rehydration, with assiduous attention to osmolality and electrolyte abnormalities. Administration of insulin addresses the generation of ketoacids, the fundamental biochemical disorder in this syndrome, and that as the ketoacids are cleared a major component of the acidemia resolves. In some circumstances clinicians have opted for treating the pH per se by buffering with intravenous bicarbonate. Significant concerns have arisen with this approach, however, with the evolving awareness that bicarbonate therapy may worsen, not improve, cerebral oxygenation in this condition [39]. Indeed, a clinical trial has demonstrated that such therapy does not help in treating the underlying condition; on the contrary, buffering the pH reverses resolution of the underlying ketoacidosis [40]. The same approach to normalizing pH has also been in another acute illness, septic shock [41]. Here the important findings were that buffering the pH did not improve either the cardiovascular performance, or the effectiveness of the vasoactive drugs being used [41].

Although not translated into the clinical setting, several laboratory studies suggest that abnormal physiology may have protective effects (e.g., hyperpyrexia in sepsis [42], and hyperosmolarity [43] and hypercapnia [44] in reperfusion injury). It has recently been suggested that multiple organ dysfunction in the context of critical illness represents a protective adaptive response rather than a set of circumstances to be aggressively prevented or reversed [45]. It was further argued that such organ dysfunction represents an effort on the part of the body to cope with on-going critical illness, and that attempts to correct this pathophysiological state could therefore result in harm [45].

### **Generation of associated errors**

Medical error has been the focus of intense recent interest. In hospitalized patients error is an important source of

morbidity and mortality, with 75% of errors being associated with “diagnostic mishaps” and 70% occurring in acute care settings [46]. An important type of error is misinterpretation of data, and when monitoring the acutely ill errors in the acquisition or interpretation of data can certainly mislead. Many examples of errors in monitoring have been described, and in many cases these result in a cascade of events that lead to significant patient harm [47].

We present an example in which experienced clinicians were misled by an incorrectly placed central vascular catheter; in this example, the response to subsequent therapy compounded the misimpression that catheter placement was correct, and that the therapy was effective [48]. The patient was assessed in the emergency room and was noted to be cyanosed, febrile, and hypotensive. The clinicians diagnosed septic shock in a patient with cyanotic cardiac disease, performed a procedure to insert a catheter into the femoral artery for monitoring purposes, and commenced infusion of a vasoconstrictor agent. The initial response, elevation in intravascular pressure in response to the therapy, appeared gratifying. However, the patient deteriorated, and upon placement of an additional central vascular catheter, which was placed in a central artery, it became obvious that the initial catheter had been placed in a vein instead of an artery. The error was detected because the waveforms of the two intravascular pressures were different. However, the error was possible because of the conditions presented. The patient had severe tricuspid valve regurgitation, and in the setting of systemic hypotension and cyanosis this resulted in severely elevated venous pressures being mistaken for arterial pressures. The error was compounded, however, because the response to therapy being sought, elevation in systemic arterial pressure, appeared to be obtained, but in fact the elevation was that of venous pressure. Thus instead of providing cardiovascular support with increased arterial pressure the therapy was compromising the heart, reducing forward flow, and increasing backward regurgitant flow. This is an example in which experienced clinicians were deceived by assumption of correct monitoring placement, a false assumption that was compounded by an apparent beneficial response to administered medication [48].

### **Training effect**

The “science” of medicine involves understanding the processes and mechanisms of sickness. Such insight should enable clinicians to adapt to altered circumstances within the context of an illness and in addition to translate knowledge and techniques from one illness state to another. While we often consider why research findings are “lost in translation” between scientific research and patient benefit [49, 50], we may not consider how appropriate it is

to translate findings from one illness context to another. Examples of translation include application of positive airways pressure to sleep apnea instead of its original use in acute respiratory failure [51], the use of a therapy that was originally thought to act on the coagulation pathway (e.g., activated protein C) to treatment of sepsis [52], and high frequency oscillatory ventilation, developed originally for treatment of neonatal respiratory failure, and now being studied in adults with ARDS [53, 54]. Such translation of treatment modalities from one disease state or population to another presupposes that the clinician understands the mechanisms of action in the original disease as well as the mechanisms of action and risk-benefit profile in the subsequent disease. In fact, although physiological insight is continuously evolving and would be necessary to predict successful “knowledge transfer” from one situation to another, there is often a major gap between physiological expectation, as predicted by the clinician, and the results of careful context-specific physiological evaluation. Thus certain interventions that may seem to make sense from past experience may ultimately be detrimental when used in an alternative context.

We present an example of a traditional therapy, hyperventilation, almost certainly highly effective in incipient brainstem herniation but harmful when translated to other patients with brain trauma in the absence of cerebral hyperemia. It has been known for decades that hyperventilation reduces intracranial pressure [55], and in subsequent years it became apparent that this could be used to clinical advantage. In incipient brainstem herniation the intracranial pressure is critically elevated, and the compliance characteristic of the solid cranium and the flexible brain are such that whereas a slight increase in pressure results in herniation and brain death, a slight reduction prevents herniation at that time. Many such patients are the victims of head trauma; indeed, almost all patients with significant head injury serious enough to require intensive care or neurosurgical intervention have at least some degree of elevated intracranial pressure. However, because acute hyperventilation is accepted practice in conditions in which intracranial pressure is most dangerous, it became commonplace to institute the same therapy in the presence of intracranial hypertension, of lesser severity. Unfortunately, this assumed the “benefits” of hyperventilation (i.e., reduction in elevated intracranial pressure, prevention of brainstem herniation) in patients in whom such factors were not important. Conversely, whereas the disadvantages of hyperventilation (i.e., focal ischemia due to vasoconstriction, diminished release of O<sub>2</sub> from circulating hemoglobin, and potentially increased local O<sub>2</sub> demand) appear minimal when weighed against impending death or irreversible brain damage, they may not be minimal when weighed against no benefit. Indeed a randomized controlled trial demonstrated that prophylactic hyperventilation in patients with severe head trauma increased the incidence of long-term CNS disability [56].

### **Targeting variables: balancing theory, physiology, and outcome**

The above account, with examples selected to support the particular points in question, requires balance; while balance is needed, in practice it is difficult. The clinician faces many problems in balancing among the issues he thinks he understands, those he does understand, and those for which he can provide evidence of benefit. Indeed the situation is even more complex because over time the response of some illness states changes. For example, goal-directed therapy in early septic shock may decrease mortality [1], but extending the notion of normalization to pharmacological supranormalization applied in later phases of the same illness can cause harm [15]. In another important condition common in the critically ill, acute respiratory distress syndrome, attempts to recruit lung volume, while successful in early stages of the disease, appear to be far less successful in more established disease [57]. Finally, hyperventilation, while harmful if applied globally to patients with severe head injury [56], may help a small number of patients with intracranial hypertension due to cerebral hyperemia.

The above clinical trials [1, 4, 22, 26, 33] are presented in a simplistic manner. While simplicity has the advantage of clarity, it ignores both the complex nature of the trials and the disease entities involved. Indeed it is important to note that several detailed critiques have generated significant debate about the interpretation and incorporation of clinical studies into practice [2, 30, 58, 59, 60].

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### **Conclusion**

Multiple examples of therapies exist in the acute care setting that are based on physiological principles, and that involve monitoring and titrating against physiological endpoints. Many such approaches either have been directly responsible for saving lives in acutely ill patients or have reflected such management strategies. Nonetheless, clinicians recognize that following physiological principles is not the same as normalizing all physiological variables. To illustrate this distinction, and the dangers associated with the latter, we have identified five patterns, with examples of each, whereby such an approach can lead to harm. As knowledge advances, clinicians will integrate evidence-based information, mechanistic knowledge, and evolving error prevention strategies to incorporate advances in monitoring technology for provision of optimal patient care.

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## Manipulating afterload for the treatment of acute heart failure

### A historical summary

For decades, digitalis and diuretics presented as the mainstay of the conventional treatment of heart failure. In the late 1960s, however, the use of positive inotropic agents was reconsidered on account of several studies demonstrating a poor hemodynamic response to digitalis and arrhythmogenic effects in patients with coronary disease. The beneficial effect of diuretics in relieving pulmonary congestion and acute pulmonary edema was clearly established. But, it was also shown that excessive use could be deleterious, leading to electrolyte imbalance, hypovolemia, low cardiac output and shock.

Before the introduction of bedside hemodynamic investigation in the early 1970s, the assessment of ventricular performance in man was essentially clinical and radiological. In patients with acute left ventricular failure, successive chest X-rays were used to demonstrate a reduction in cardiac size or a clearing of pulmonary congestion. In view of the usefulness of assessing ventricular function in experimental animals by relating filling pressure to ventricular performance during volume expansion, it was thought that a similar approach in man might be of interest. But the method appeared not to be convenient due to reflex adjustments to the change in blood volume.

In 1964, an important paper, by John Ross and Eugene Braunwald, was published in *Circulation* [1] de-

scribing a new method to evaluate left ventricular function by increasing resistance to ventricular ejection. They investigated the ventricular response to graded infusions of angiotensin in patients with and without clinical evidence of impaired left ventricular function. The method used consisted in simultaneous measurements of left ventricular pressure, obtained by transseptal left heart catheterization, and cardiac output determined by the indicator-dilution technique. It was thus possible to construct individual function curves while relating stroke work to filling pressure and to compare the response to a progressive increase in resistance to ventricular ejection. It appeared that, in patients with normal or near normal left ventricular function, there was a steep increase in ventricular stroke work with small elevations in left ventricular end-diastolic pressure. By contrast, in patients with signs of a markedly depressed functional capacity, the initial limb of the curve was flat or even descending, demonstrating a fall in cardiac index and stroke volume as the arterial blood pressure and left ventricular filling pressure rose.

This study was of primary importance for understanding heart function in disease. It demonstrated that the left ventricular response to increased resistance to ejection was highly dependent of its function: in

normal hearts stroke work increased with the augmented afterload so that stroke volume was maintained constant; by contrast, in severely depressed hearts, stroke volume decreased with any increase in aortic pressure. Surprisingly, this new concept did not give rise to the potential implications it contained for clinicians and apparently none raised the question: if an increase in resistance to ventricular ejection worsens ventricular performance, might its reduction be used to improve this?

Our personal experience with vasodilators for the treatment of severe acute left ventricular failure began in the early 1960s, with an erroneous diagnosis. It concerned a 60-year-old patient who was hospitalized in the ICU of the university medical department for severe acute pulmonary edema. Upon admission, he was tachypneic and cyanotic. Blood pressure was extremely unstable oscillating between 150 and 240 mmHg of systolic and 100 and 140 of diastolic pressures. There were signs of intense peripheral vasoconstriction with a cold and clammy skin. Electrocardiogram showed sinus tachycardia with frequent supraventricular ectopic beats and diffuse T wave inversions. Chest X-ray demonstrated marked pulmonary venous congestion and enlarged cardiac silhouette. The patient was immediately treated with high concentrations of oxygen, diuretics and digitalis. The response was poor. Hypertension and tachypnea persisted with signs of clinical shock.

A pheochromocytoma was suspected and an intravenous infusion of phentolamine, an agent with adrenergic and sympathetic blockade properties, was initiated in an attempt to correct hypertension. The drug produced an immediate and dramatic clinical improvement: peripheral signs of shock subsided, blood pressure progressively normalized and pulmonary venous congestion improved. The infusion was progressively discontinued and the patient recovered uneventfully. The beneficial

response to phentolamine with a positive test for catecholamines in a sample of urine collected during the hypertensive crisis made likely the diagnosis of pheochromocytoma but all subsequent urinary tests were negative. The diagnosis could not be confirmed and the excessive excretion of urinary catecholamines was attributed to an intense and temporary drive in sympathetic activity related to acute left ventricular failure.

The surprising benefit obtained with phentolamine infusion in a patient with acute pulmonary edema lead us to investigate further the role of vasodilation in left ventricular failure [2]. Seven patients were studied, five of whom had a history of acute myocardial infarction. All were admitted to the intensive care unit for refractory acute pulmonary edema, associated with hypertension in six. Arterial blood gas analysis with repeated lactate determinations were used as an index of severity of the patient's condition. Upon admission, all patients demonstrated marked hypoxemia in spite of oxygen therapy ( $\text{SaO}_2$ : 56–76%) and severe metabolic acidosis ( $\text{pH}$ : 7.08–7.33) with a mean lactate concentration of 6.4 mEq/l, indicative of severe tissue anoxia. Phentolamine was administered by a constant infusion at a dose varying between 5 and 20 mg/h. The response was rapid, characterized by the disappearance of pulmonary edema, the normalization of arterial blood and central venous pressures and the complete correction of lactic acidosis in a few hours. The series was extended to include finally a total of 15 patients with the same clinical and metabolic response [3]. All patients survived.

These results attested to an important improvement in tissue perfusion after vasodilator administration and were attributed to a decreased systolic load due to the fall in systemic resistance combined with better distribution of peripheral perfusion following the relief of excessive adrenergic vasoconstriction.

As a matter of fact, Taylor et al. [4] had already investigated the circulatory effects of the acute intravenous injection of phentolamine in normal subjects and in patients with hypertensive disease. The intravenous administration of 5 mg of the drug was shown to produce a prompt reduction in systemic vascular resistance. This resulted in a rapid fall in systemic blood pressure associated with a significant increase in heart rate and cardiac output without large or consistent changes in stroke volume. The response was essentially the same in both groups of subjects, although the time course of their response was different, being significantly slower in the hypertensive group. It was concluded that the predominant vascular activity of phentolamine was to cause a direct relaxation of vascular smooth muscle on the resistance vessels of the systemic circulation. The drug also developed a moderate antagonism to circulating catecholamines with a weak sympathetic blocking activity.

Considering the circulatory effects of phentolamine observed in normal subjects, it could be assumed that such a vasodilation in patients with acute left ventricular failure would be of particular benefit. It had been previously shown that the onset of pump failure was associated with two "compensatory" mechanisms: a reflex vasoconstriction in systemic vessels causing an increase in left ventricular workload and myocardial oxygen demand and a redistribution of blood volume towards the heart and the lungs. It could then be assumed that pharmacological vasodilation would improve ventricular ejection and possibly produce a shift of blood from the lungs to the periphery by reducing venous tone.

These hypotheses were fully confirmed by Majid, Sharma and Taylor in an article published in the *Lancet* [5] a few months after our initial presentation. In a series of 12 patients with severe acute or subacute left ventricular failure due to ischemic heart disease, phentolamine

was administered by intravenous infusion. The initial dose was 5 mg/min for 1 min followed by a dose adjusted in each subject to reduce the supine mean systemic arterial pressure by approximately 25 mmHg. The fall in blood pressure produced rapid relief of dyspnea associated with a progressive clearing in pulmonary edema and a significant reduction of heart size, as we had described. But most interesting was the hemodynamic response observed in the group of patients with severe heart failure: phentolamine infusion produced a rapid and substantial reduction in left ventricular end-diastolic and pulmonary-artery mean pressures associated with an increase in stroke volume and cardiac output. These benefits in ventricular performance were attributed essentially to two mechanisms: the reduction in cardiac pressure load obtained by lowering the raised vascular resistance and an increase in the capacity of the peripheral vessels, particularly the veins, which reduced the volume of blood in the dilated heart. A reflex increase in sympathetic activity secondary to the fall in systemic blood pressure could not be definitively discarded. But the absence of significant change in heart rate made an increase in inotropic activity unlikely.

This study was the first to use sophisticated left and right catheterization techniques to measure the response of cardiac output and filling pressures to peripheral vasodilation. It demonstrated the therapeutic value of reducing systemic vascular resistance in patients with severe left ventricular failure. It showed that relief of the workload of a failing heart could provide significant clinical benefit with apparently no hazard to the cerebral and coronary circulations.

During the early 1970s, several studies demonstrated that the incidence and severity of left ventricular failure complicating acute myocardial infarction were directly related to the extent of ventricular mass necrosis.

Consequently the ideal therapy would minimize myocardial oxygen demand and raise oxygen delivery to the ischemic area. On a theoretical basis, one could expect that phentolamine, as well as other vasodilators, might improve heart pump function without interfering adversely with the myocardial oxygen metabolism.

In 1973, Kelly et al. [6] used phentolamine to decrease arterial blood pressure in 11 hypertensive patients with acute myocardial infarction and left ventricular dysfunction. Six had a history of chronic hypertension confirmed by ophthalmoscopy and electrocardiographic signs of left ventricular hypertrophy. The remaining five had no previous history of hypertension. The hemodynamic response to low doses of phentolamine was similar to those previously described with a significant decline in arterial and pulmonary capillary wedge pressures and a concomitant increase in cardiac index. Interestingly, as stroke work index and heart rate were unchanged, the rate-pressure time product thought to be a reasonable index of myocardial oxygen consumption decreased significantly in the group with acute hypertension. The conclusion was that, in such conditions of acute hypertension, reduction of left ventricular afterload might offer advantages over current therapy for left ventricular dysfunction.

A few months later another clinical investigation was published in the same journal by Chatterjee et al. [7] from the group of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, describing the hemodynamic and metabolic responses to vasodilator therapy in patients with acute myocardial infarction. Thirty-eight patients were examined and were divided in three groups according to the severity of left ventricular failure estimated on the initial level of pulmonary capillary wedge pressure and stroke work index. In group III (15 patients) all had clinical evidence of left ventricular failure, 14 had frank pulmonary edema and 8 had clinical features of

shock. In 11 patients, phentolamine was used: 5 mg were administered intravenously in the first minute then at a rate of 0.1–0.2 mg/min. In the remaining 27 patients, sodium nitroprusside was infused at a rate of 16–200 µg/min. The infusion of the vasodilator was gradually increased until the mean arterial blood pressure decreased by not more than 20 mmHg or when there was a significant decrease in pulmonary capillary wedge pressure. Pressures and cardiac output were measured with a balloon-tip triple lumen catheter using the thermodilution technique. Coronary sinus flow was determined by the constant infusion technique. The myocardial extraction ratio for lactate was calculated from arterial and coronary sinus blood samples.

The study showed that the hemodynamic response to phentolamine or nitroprusside was identical to that reported previously. But it also demonstrated that the benefit in heart performance was greater in those patients with the most severely depressed cardiac function. The functional improvement was obtained without any increase in metabolic cost. Myocardial oxygen demand either remained unchanged or even, in some cases, fell and myocardial lactate extraction did not decrease. Therefore, it appeared that vasodilator therapy might well play an important role in the treatment of pump failure following myocardial infarction.

These expectations were confirmed in another hemodynamic study performed in a series of 15 patients with acute myocardial infarction [8]. It was shown that with a dose of 10 mg/h, phentolamine could be used in normotensive patients without adverse effects; the fall of mean arterial blood pressure was less than 15 mmHg and was associated with a significant increase in cardiac output and a substantial reduction in right and left filling pressures. The overall clinical course appeared surprisingly good with a mortality rate of 13% in a group of high-risk patients.

In conclusion, for years the therapy of congestive heart failure had focused on trying to influence the factors which at that time were recognized as the determinants of myocardial function, such as reducing the diastolic filling of the ventricle with diuretics or increasing its contractility with inotropic drugs. In the early 1960s, several studies demonstrated that the diseased left ventricle was highly dependent on peripheral vascular factors, which had been hitherto relatively neglected. In the normal heart, an increased impedance to ventricular ejection was well tolerated and did not change stroke volume. In the presence of left ventricular dysfunction, an enhanced impedance could lead to a decrease in cardiac output with an increase in ventricular volume and pressure. This abnormal response appeared of particular importance when it was

shown that heart failure itself produced an arteriolar vasoconstriction and different alterations in vascular wall structure, which increased impedance to ventricular outflow and thus further deteriorated ventricular performance. The pharmacological reduction of impedance with the use of vasodilator drugs led to a new approach. It has proved to be a most important adjunction in the management of both acute and chronic heart failure [9].

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## Nosocomial pneumonia

**Abstract** Nosocomial pneumonia, or terminal pneumonia as it was formerly called, results from the repetitive microaspiration of contaminated oropharyngeal secretions into the lungs in the presence of impaired host defenses. This pathophysiologic sequence was suggested by the observations of Osler but clarified by the seminal work of Rouby and colleagues. The enormous impact of antimicrobial agents on the organisms responsible for nosocomial pneumonias was first identified by Kneeland and Price who found that organisms of the normal pharyngeal flora virtually disappeared in terminal pneumonias following administration of these drugs, being replaced by gram-negative bacilli. The remarkable susceptibility of seriously ill patients to becoming colonized by exogenous organisms, even in the absence of antimicrobial therapy, was shown by Johanson et al. These factors, antibi-

otics and the change in bacterial binding receptors in the airways associated with illness, lead to infections caused by exogenous organisms that are frequently resistant to antimicrobial agents. Clinical findings that usually identify patients with respiratory infections are unreliable for the diagnosis of nosocomial pneumonias as shown by Andrews et al. Invasive techniques, especially the protected specimen brush (PSB) technique, avoid contamination of the specimen by proximal secretions and accurately reflect the bacterial burden of the lung, as first shown by Chastre et al. Quantitation of such specimens serves as an excellent proxy for direct cultures of the lung and are the current gold standard for diagnosis.

**Keywords** Nosocomial pneumonia · Protected specimen brush · Aspiration

### Introduction

The development of pneumonia in patients who are already seriously ill with a different process is not a new phenomenon but one that has long been recognized with the phrase “Pneumonia is the old man’s friend” – the implication being that pneumonia is the mode of exit from this worldly life when continued existence becomes problematic. Sir William Osler honed his world-renowned clinical skills at the autopsy table where he had the opportunity to correlate his clinical findings directly with anatomical findings, an opportunity very

largely lost to today’s physicians, at least in the United States. In his classic text, “The Principles and Practice of Medicine” [1], Osler discusses at length the differences between lobar pneumonia and forms of pneumonia that occurred in other settings such as complications of other diseases, post-operatively, especially following ether anesthesia, or as in so-called “terminal pneumonias”.

He thought that no physician could miss the diagnosis of lobar pneumonia, based on the presenting signs and symptoms, even without a chest radiograph. In contrast, the other forms of pneumonia were easily overlooked, leading to Osler’s comment that there was a much great-

er incidence of terminal pneumonia in the autopsy room than on the wards. These pneumonias were lobular initially, consisting of an intense neutrophilic inflammatory exudate centered on a small bronchiole located in a dependent portion of the lung. This infection was then, and still is today, caused by the microaspiration of small quantities of contaminated oropharyngeal secretions in the presence of host defenses that are unable to eliminate the challenge. We will review two aspects of these infections; the pathophysiology and the methods of diagnosis in the midst of confounding factors.

### **Pathophysiology of nosocomial pneumonia**

It is now understood that nosocomial pneumonia is usually initiated by colonization of the upper respiratory tract by potentially pathogenic bacteria. Secretions contaminated by these bacteria are aspirated in small quantities into the lungs—around the cuff of an endotracheal tube if present. The lung's antibacterial defenses try to inactivate this bacterial bolus. If these defenses are successful, pneumonia will not result. If they are unsuccessful, infection occurs, beginning as bronchiolitis and progressing to bronchopneumonia that may extend to involve adjacent regions of lung in a confluent pneumonia with or without abscess formation. Osler [1] understood the outlines of this process when he wrote about either weakening the lining of the lungs to allow postoperative pneumonias to develop.

Studies of the pathophysiology of complex clinical processes are usually difficult and the work of any one group of investigators is often incomplete. Every now and then a particularly important study is completed that brings much of the field into focus. Such was the case with the paper published in 1992 by Rouby et al. [2]. These investigators utilized a French law that enables researchers to perform an autopsy shortly after the patient's death to obtain specimens for research if not expressly forbidden by the patient. They performed a bedside thoracotomy and removed either the left or right lung of 83 patients who died while receiving mechanical ventilation for respiratory failure. The removed lungs were serially sectioned so that five to ten samples were obtained from each bronchopulmonary segment for histologic examination. Additional sections from each lobe were submitted for microbiologic study. In 69 of the 83 patients a bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) procedure had been performed within 48 h prior to death as part of a prospective study of pneumonias. Thus, the key features that make this such an important study are (1) a large sample size; (2) prospective data collection for some elements; (3) meticulous pathologic techniques, especially serial sectioning of the lungs and (4) sampling performed immediately after death.

Infection was found in 60 of 83 (72%) lungs and occurred predominantly in dependent lung segments indi-

cating the aspirational nature of this process. Stages of severity from bronchiolitis alone, to bronchopneumonia, to lung abscess were readily recognized and lesions at varying stages usually co-existed in the same lung, suggesting a recurring process. Foci of infection were widely dispersed among areas of either normal lung or lung tissue involved with other pathologic processes such as diffuse alveolar damage. Without serial sectioning, many foci of infection would have been missed and the patient wrongly categorized as uninfected. The correlation between microbiologic results and histology was imperfect but illuminating (Table 1). In general, higher bacterial counts were associated with more advanced lesions of infection, i.e. bronchopneumonia and abscess. No microbial growth was observed in lobes free of infectious lesions histologically. However, 30–40% of lobes that showed infectious lesions had no bacterial growth but over 90% of these patients were receiving intravenous antibiotics.

These findings indicate that nosocomial bronchopneumonia occurs in most patients undergoing prolonged mechanical ventilation, when defined by histologic criteria. Foci of bronchopneumonia may become sterile either as a result of successful host defenses or the effect of powerful antibiotics, or both. Alternatively, progressive lung infection with systemic manifestations results if host defenses, with or without antibiotics, are unable to rise to the challenge posed by colonization of distal airways [3]. The source of organisms that colonize the distal airways remains somewhat controversial, with some investigators finding that colonization of the stomach precedes colonization of the airways [4]. In most cases, colonization of the stomach is the result of swallowing contaminated secretions [5]. Airway colonization by *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and related organisms seems to differ from the usual pattern with colonization of the distal airways occurring first, before any more proximal site [6]. That may be because receptors to bind *P. aeruginosa* are more readily available in the trachea and more distal sites. Alternatively, it may suggest that colonization is the result of aerosol contamination by *P. aeruginosa* and other organisms that thrive in water, such as *Serratia marcescens*.

Many studies of nosocomial pneumonia have failed to reproduce one or another of the key features of the Rouby study. Most are readily explained by a careful evaluation of the data and study design. For example, many studies have found a lower prevalence of pneumonia—in some cases much lower. As Rouby et al. [2] pointed out, the prevalence they found was due to serial sectioning of the lungs, enabling them to identify small focal lesions that would have been missed by the less rigorous sampling techniques that are generally used. Some have suggested that sterile inflammatory lesions cannot be bacterial pneumonias and argue that a histologic gold standard overestimates the incidence of pneu-

**Table 1** Correlation of lung histology and microbiology [2]

Histologic grading of severity	Number of lobes	Quantitative colony counts in lung tissue (cfu/g)		
		No growth	<10 <sup>3</sup> Colonies	≥10 <sup>3</sup> Colonies
No infection	43	43 (100%)	0	0
Bronchiolitis	20	6 (30%)	14 (70%)	0
Bronchopneumonia	15	6 (40%)	4 (27%)	5 (33%)
Confluent pneumonia	18	7 (39%)	5 (28%)	6 (33%)
Total	96	62	23	11

**Table 2** Post-mortem culture results in the pre-antibiotic era [7]

Organism	Bronchopneumonia (n = 109)		No bronchopneumonia (n = 98)	
	Lung isolates (%)	Nasopharyngeal colonization (%)	Lung isolates (%)	Nasopharyngeal colonization (%)
<i>Streptococcus pneumoniae</i>	37	78	11	39
Group A streptococci	7	80	6	50
<i>Haemophilus influenzae</i>	21	78	4	20
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	41	58	24	44

monia. However, sterile lesions usually co-exist with other lesions with positive cultures. As with the presence of positive cultures in regions that do not show histologic pneumonias, these findings are likely explained by sampling errors induced by the focal nature of this process.

## Historical perspective

Colonization, or the persistence of a bacterial species at a particular site over time, is a root cause of nosocomial pneumonia. The upper airways of healthy individuals contain a limited bacterial flora, including a number that are potentially pathogenic. In fact, the organisms that we regard as being highly pathogenic for the respiratory tract, such as *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, are members of the normal flora. In the pre-antibiotic era, these were the organisms that caused pneumonia, whether nosocomial or community-acquired.

Smillie and Duerschner [7] reported, in 1947, their findings in an autopsy study of 109 subjects with terminal pneumonia and 98 people who died but did not have pneumonia at post-mortem. Specimens of peripheral lung and nasopharyngeal swabs were cultured (Table 2). These results were interpreted as showing that terminal bronchopneumonias were caused by organisms that were members of the normal nasopharyngeal flora and that colonization of the upper respiratory tract with the same organisms found in the lungs was readily demonstrated at the time of autopsy. Nasopharyngeal colonization was also common among patients who did not have pneumonia. The role of *Staphylococcus aureus* was uncertain,

primarily because it so often colonized the nasopharynx of patients who did not have pneumonia. Gram-negative bacilli (GNB) were found in "some" patients, but were not felt to play an important role.

By 1960 the situation had changed dramatically. Kneeland and Price [8] duplicated the earlier study in an autopsy series of 200 consecutive patients; 110 were found to have terminal, or nosocomial, pneumonia. The authors compared the causative organisms to those reported by Smillie and Duerschner [7] 10 years earlier (Table 3). Clearly, an enormous shift in the bacteria associated with nosocomial pneumonia had occurred in this 10-year period. Kneeland and Price [8] were far more convinced about the pathogenicity of *S. aureus* than had been their predecessors, thinking that it was "probably a pathogen". This impression was influenced by the impact of the influenza pandemic in the late 1950s. Pneumonias due to normal flora, e.g. *S. pneumoniae*, *H. influenzae*, and Group A streptococci, were seen only in patients who had not received antimicrobial therapy.

The reason for the predominance of the normal flora organisms as the cause of pneumonia is simply that they are more pathogenic for the lungs than other organisms. However, serious illness or surgery causes a shift in the availability of receptors for other bacterial species in the respiratory tract so that colonization by GNB, *S. aureus* and other organisms may occur. In 1969, Johanson et al. [9] reported that the pharyngeal flora of hospitalized, ill patients underwent a dramatic and swift alteration. GNB that rarely colonized the throats of healthy individuals appeared quickly in throat swabs of sick patients, with their prevalence being proportional to the severity of illness. Antibiotics alone were not responsible. For exam-

**Table 3** Etiologies of terminal pneumonia, 1947 and 1957

Organism	1946–47 [7] (n = 109; %)	1956–57 [8] (n = 110; %)
<i>Streptococcus pneumoniae</i>	37	6
Group A streptococci	7	0
<i>Haemophilus influenzae</i>	21	4
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	41	50
<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>	0	24
<i>Klebsiella pneumoniae</i>	0	25
Other Gram-negative bacilli	“Some”	19

ple, GNB colonization ranged from 0–2% among hospitalized patients who were not physically ill (psychiatry patients) and non-hospitalized healthy people, but was found in 62% of moribund patients in the absence of antibiotic therapy. Antibiotic therapy increased GNB colonization to 80% in the latter patients. This study showed that underlying disease was an important determinant of GNB colonization in addition to antibiotic therapy.

Seriously ill patients are remarkably susceptible to acquiring exogenous organisms from their environment, a susceptibility not shared by healthy individuals. Antibiotics, either given to the patient or present in the patient's environment, cause strong pressure on the bacterial flora and select resistant strains. Trouillet et al. [10] analyzed the factors associated with potentially drug-resistant (PDR) bacteria in nosocomial pneumonias and found that prior antibiotic therapy, prior broad spectrum antibiotic use and the duration of mechanical ventilation were each associated with an increasing prevalence of PDR infections. Pneumonias that occurred early in the hospital course or before antibiotics had been given were usually caused by antibiotic-susceptible organisms.

It is fortunate that members of the normal bacterial flora of the respiratory tract have remained susceptible to most antibiotics so that administration of almost any antibiotic leads to the swift elimination of these organisms. The result of these two factors, the change in bacterial binding sites in the airways and the elimination of the normal flora by antibiotics, is that the airways of sick individuals become colonized by organisms that are not normally present, such as GNB. However, members of the normal flora are acquiring antimicrobial genes in greater numbers. Clinicians soon may be faced with the specter of pneumonias caused by normal flora organisms that are resistant to common, if not all, antibiotics. Given the greater pathogenicity of these organisms, such a resistance pattern could potentially recreate the pre-antibiotic era.

### Diagnosis of nosocomial pneumonia

The shortcomings of a histologic gold standard have led to a variety of studies exploring the usefulness of surrogate measures. Osler, of course, relied entirely on his

findings at autopsy to make the diagnosis of terminal, or nosocomial, pneumonia. In the absence of antibiotics, the evolution of pneumonia follows a predictable histologic course that is closely correlated with quantitative microbiologic findings in both experimental animals and humans. Following the inoculation of pathogenic bacteria into the lungs resident alveolar macrophages phagocytose and kill the invading bacteria. If they are unable to do so, neutrophils are recruited from the blood into alveolar spaces, a sequence that has been known for over 100 years [11]. This process begins in the region of terminal bronchioles because of the rapid increase in cross-sectional area of the airways at that level with the resultant deposition of inhaled materials. Inflammation spreads quickly to adjacent alveoli if not contained. In acute situations, and in the absence of antibiotics, recognizable foci of bronchopneumonia require bacterial densities of approximately  $10^4$  cfu/g [12]. Confluent pneumonias are associated with approximately  $10^7$  cfu/g and abscesses even greater numbers. However, the association between histology and quantitative microbiology becomes much less tight over time as lung defenses kill organisms and the milieu of the consolidated lung no longer supports bacterial multiplication [13].

Nevertheless, histologic findings remain the principal “gold standard” for nosocomial pneumonia, even though regarded as unreliable by some investigators, due to poor agreement among multiple reviewers [14]. Factors that contribute to uncertainty about the recognition of pneumonia histologically include the presence of underlying lung disease, especially diffuse alveolar damage and pulmonary edema, and certain systemic processes, notably marked leukopenia. However, the major confounding factor is antibiotic therapy that has the capacity to sterilize pneumonic lesions long before they resolve histologically leading to the often-observed disparity between histology and microbiology and limiting the usefulness of histology as a gold standard. At least that problem is well understood. The problem that is not understood is the extent of histologic pneumonia that must be present to be important clinically. Since aspiration presumably occurs on a daily basis in mechanically ventilated patients, new foci of potential bronchopneumonia are being initiated every day. Within a few days, there are foci at the stage of bronchiolitis, some at the early broncho-

pneumonia stage and perhaps others at the confluent stage. How many of what types of lesions are necessary to produce clinical signs of pneumonia is not known.

A number of investigators have examined the relationship between histologic evidence of nosocomial pneumonia and clinical signs of infection. Andrews and coworkers [15] studied 24 patients who died while enrolled in a prospective study of acute respiratory failure. Multiple sections through both lungs were examined by a pathologist who was blinded to the clinical history of the patient. Similarly, clinicians made the determination of whether or not pneumonia was present at the time of the patient's death based on the clinical findings while blinded to the pathologic findings. Foci of bronchopneumonia were found in 14 (58%) patients in at least one lung segment and these were classified as having histologic pneumonias. Only 9 of these 14 patients (64%) were classified by the clinicians as having clinical pneumonia at the time of death. Similarly, two of ten patients (20%) who had only diffuse alveolar damage without pneumonia histologically were diagnosed clinically as having pneumonia. These findings have been reproduced in a number of studies [16, 17, 18] and it is clear that clinical findings are not reliable indicators of the presence or absence of histologic pneumonia in mechanically ventilated patients, especially those with ARDS.

Since nosocomial pneumonia is caused by the presence of bacteria in normally sterile regions of the lungs, it seems obvious that appropriate cultures should provide a useful surrogate for a histologic diagnostic standard. The value of expectorated sputum, analogous to a tracheal aspirate in an intubated patient for this purpose, has been debated for nearly 100 years [19, 20]. Sputum has the great advantages of ready availability and lack of expense. However, colonization of proximal airways, including the oropharynx, with multiple species of bacteria causes contamination of specimens passing through, so that potentially pathogenic bacteria are present in expectorated sputum or tracheal aspirates from most patients, whether or not they have pneumonia.

An often-overlooked aspect of sputum or tracheal aspirates as a source of material is the handling of the specimen. A previous generation of physicians was taught to inspect the sample carefully, preferably in a petri dish, and to select the most purulent portion with sterile scissors or a loop. Another recommended approach was to have the patient rinse his mouth with sterile water prior to expectoration [21, 22] or to wash the specimen repeatedly with sterile water in a container [23]. This was shown to remove a significant number of oral bacteria in subsequent culture, presumably from the surface of the specimen. Another technique is to homogenize the sample as is done for quantitative cultures. It is believed that organisms present in sputum at high concentrations are more likely to be important than those present at low concentrations. An organism present in

sputum at a concentration of  $10^5$  cfu/ml or more has long been believed to be the cause of community-acquired pneumonia [23], a notion based on the premise that pneumonias were caused by single organisms.

The protected specimen brush (PSB) technique is a highly selective approach to the sampling of secretions in the distal airways while avoiding contamination by proximal secretions [24]. Chastre et al. [25] performed a landmark study in 26 patients who died while receiving mechanical ventilation. While ventilation was continued, bronchoscopy was performed and PSB samples were obtained from the anterior segment of the left lower lobe (LLL). A mini-thoracotomy was then performed and multiple samples of lung tissue were obtained from the same segment for histology and quantitative cultures. Six patients had histologic pneumonias in the anterior segment of the LLL, 20 did not. Lung tissue cultures yielded  $10^4$  cfu/g or more of lung tissue in all six patients with pneumonia. In four (67%) patients these infections were polymicrobial with multiple organisms present at concentrations of  $10^4$  cfu/g or more. Interestingly, none of these four patients had received antibiotics in the week before their death and the predominant organisms were members of the normal oropharyngeal flora, such as *S. pneumoniae*. In the two pneumonia patients who had received antibiotics, the predominant organisms were *P. aeruginosa* and *Proteus mirabilis*. Overall there was a highly significant correlation between lung tissue cultures and PSB cultures. A cut-off value for the PSB of  $10^3$  cfu/ml identified all patients with pneumonia. As expected, some patients whose PSB cultures yielded  $10^3$  cfu/ml or more did not have pneumonia in the anterior segment of the LLL.

The Rouby study would predict that a focal pneumonia would have been found in a nearby segment [2]. This is a drawback of the sampling strategy used by Chastre et al. [25]. A total of 30 organisms were recovered from cultures of lung tissue from the 26 patients while 51 organisms were recovered from PSB samples. Virtually all of the excess PSB yield was accounted for by GNB and fungi, suggesting that contamination by proximal colonizing organisms was an additional contributing factor to the discrepancy between PSB and tissue cultures. Nevertheless, this study showed that the PSB technique closely reflects the bacterial burden of the lung segment sampled and that a quantitative value of  $10^3$  cfu/ml or more provides a reliable cut-off to identify patients with pneumonia. Selection of an anterior segment may explain the relatively low prevalence of pneumonia in this study. Overall, this study showed that PSB samples do meet the objective of finding a usable surrogate for the histologic gold standard.

It is important to understand the mechanics of PSB sampling. The PSB samples approximately 0.001 ml of secretions. Virtually all investigators who have utilized this technique have placed the PSB in 1.0 ml of sterile water or saline for vigorous shaking or vortexing. Sam-

ples of this 1.0 ml are then plated in various dilutions. A final result of  $10^3$  cfu/ml would indicate that the original material sampled in the airway contained a concentration of bacteria of  $10^6$  cfu/ml. Many studies have verified these findings and have found that bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) provides similar information although with a cut-off value of  $10^4$  cfu/ml or more [26, 27, 28, 29]. Studies that have failed to support the findings of Chastre et al. [25] generally suffer from one or more critical faults, the most important of which is failure to account for antibiotic therapy appropriately. It has become clear that changes in therapy within 72 h of invasive sampling renders the results unpredictable and often not interpretable [30]. A second consideration is the failure to match histologic and PSB samples sources closely. Several recent studies have reported that quantitative cultures of tracheal aspirates have greater sensitivity than more invasive PSB or BAL samples [31, 32]. This would be expected from the pathophysiology of these infections, in which colonization precedes infection and many more organisms colonize proximal ways than cause pneumonia. The specificity of BAL and PSB remain greater than that of tracheal aspirates [31, 32]. These findings have been reproduced in a non-human primate model of respiratory failure as well [33].

Attempts to diagnose pneumonia by non-microbiologic techniques have been generally unsuccessful. Elastin fragments have been identified in the sputum of patients with pneumonias caused by GNB [34, 35]. The source of

the elastin is presumably necrosis of alveolar walls or airways, but it is not found in the sputum of patients with other types of pneumonia and, hence, has limited usefulness. Endotoxin is also found in the sputum of patients with GNB pneumonias but it may be difficult to distinguish colonization from infection [36, 37]. Various antigens unique to organisms found in the lungs, such as pneumococcal polysaccharide capsular material, confirm the fact that the organism is present but do not distinguish between colonization and infection.

## Summary

Critically ill patients are remarkably susceptible to colonization by exogenous bacteria which, in the hospital environment, are often antibiotic-resistant. Differences in hospital environments account for the widely varying bacterial etiologies among different hospitals and the necessity of knowing current antibiotic susceptibility patterns for each hospital. PSB and BAL provide useful surrogates for histology in the diagnosis of nosocomial pneumonia as long as certain precautions are followed. Most important is the avoidance of obtaining cultures shortly after changing antibiotics. Finally, the pathophysiology of nosocomial pneumonia as explained by Rouby and colleagues [2] provides a framework for the understanding of this process that is extremely useful in the interpretation of new research findings.

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Konrad J. Falke

## The introduction of positive endexpiratory pressure into mechanical ventilation: a retrospective

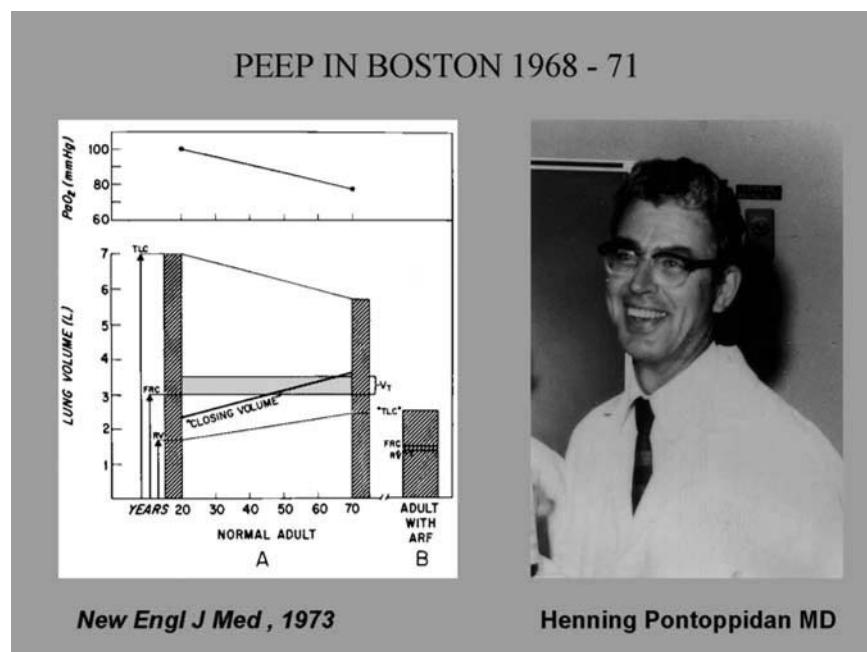
Continuous positive pressure breathing consisting of a pressure in the airways above the atmospheric level during spontaneous inspiration and expiration was used in the treatment of pulmonary edema and severe pneumonia even before World War II [1]. Positive endexpiratory airway pressure was also very commonly used in the experimental laboratory in any open chest preparation in order to prevent expiratory lung collapse. An important precondition for the introduction of positive endexpiratory pressure (PEEP) in conjunction with mechanical ventilation was established by the experiments of Cournand et al. in 1948 [2]. They found, however, that, compared to mechanical ventilation with ambient endexpiratory pressure, mechanical ventilation with PEEP was associated with a marked decrease in cardiac output due to reduced venous return of blood to the heart. Possible negative circulatory effects were the major concern in the early phase of clinical application of positive endexpiratory pressure.

PEEP in conjunction with mechanical ventilation as it is used today first became possible with the introduction of the Engström mechanical ventilator in Sweden in the mid-1950s. This machine already had an attachment which allowed endexpiratory pressure to be increased above the atmospheric level. Presumably this option was

added by the inventors in order to prevent endexpiratory lung collapse during open chest surgery. The first reported clinically important use of PEEP was undertaken in the cardiac catheterization laboratory of the University Hospital in Zürich, Switzerland, by Bühlmann, Gattiker, and Hossli, who published their work in the *Schweizer Medizinische Wochenschrift* in 1964 [3]. They demonstrated very impressively in patients with mitral valve disease that mechanical ventilation with continuous positive airway pressure led to a marked decrease in the pulmonary capillary wedge pressure despite the increase in alveolar pressure. This reflected the decrease in pulmonary vascular and cardiac transmural pressures which occurs when endexpiratory airway pressure is increased—a phenomenon which was elucidated years later by many studies, an example being the work of Qvist et al. in 1975 [4]. Bühlmann and his colleagues already found in their patients that continuous positive airway pressure ventilation led to improved mixed venous oxygen saturation despite a decrease in cardiac output, indicating a reduction in pulmonary right-to-left shunt and an improvement in arterial oxygenation. However, because they could not measure arterial blood gases at that time, they did not recognize the clinical significance of this finding.

The first clinical evidence that PEEP increases lung volume in correlation with an improvement in arterial oxygenation was established by Frumin et al. in 1959 [5] in anesthetized patients, although they too could only rely on O<sub>2</sub> saturation measurements. They explained the positive effect of PEEP on the alveolar arterial O<sub>2</sub> difference by a possible recruitment of closed alveolar gas spaces. They hypothesized that intermittent alveolar collapse with maintained perfusion might take place during endexpiration, a phenomenon which they called “shunt in time” being reduced by the use of PEEP. (Much later this was supported by the finding of marked swings of Pao<sub>2</sub> during the respiratory cycle in left atrial blood, especially if large tidal volumes and low respiratory frequencies were used (present author's unpublished observation, 1971).

**Fig. 1** Henning Pontoppidan M.D., Professor and Director of the Respiratory Intensive Care Unit at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, in Boston in 1971. The graph shows his view of the changes in  $\text{PaO}_2$  and lung volumes with age (A) and with acute lung disease (B) based on the measurements of FRC using helium dilution carried out in 1969–71 at the Massachusetts General Hospital [13]. This was later characterized by Gattinoni and Pesenti [17] as the so-called “baby lung” in ARDS patients

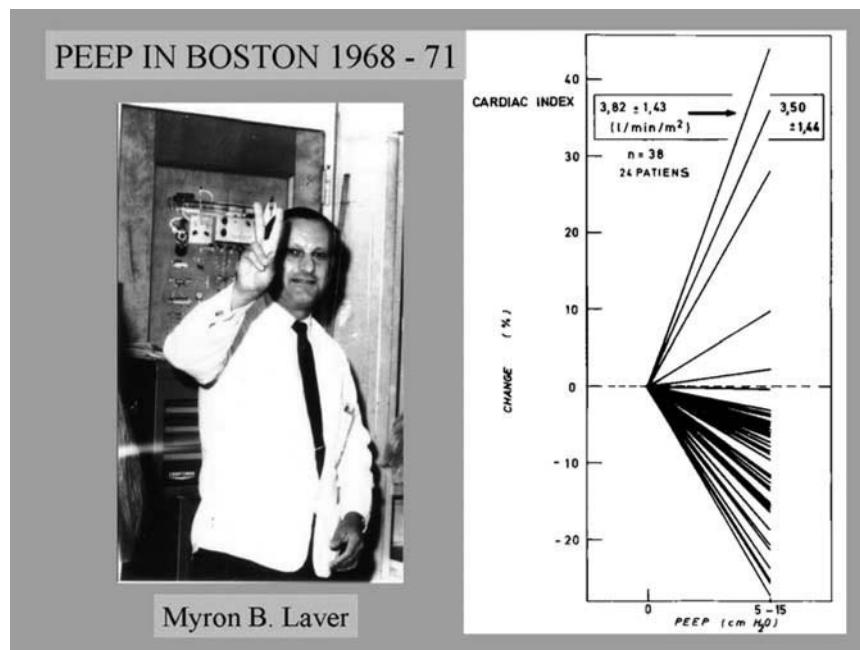


Hence, it was not until the mid-1960s, when Thomas Petty in Denver had learned how to determine arterial blood gases, that the potential of mechanical ventilation with PEEP to improve arterial oxygenation was recognized [6]. Petty and his colleagues first used an Engström anesthesia mechanical ventilator equipped with a device to produce PEEP. They discovered that in mechanically ventilated patients with hypoxic acute respiratory failure, which they termed “adult respiratory distress syndrome” (ARDS), the addition of PEEP was capable of relieving severe life-threatening hypoxemia with cyanosis. Their famous paper [7], published in the *Lancet* in 1967 (after being rejected by three major US journals!), became a milestone in the evolution of respiratory intensive care medicine. The news spread very quickly, and in spring of 1969 a group of enthusiastic clinical researchers under the direction of Henning Pontoppidan (Fig. 1) and Myron B. Laver (Fig. 2) started to further investigate mechanical ventilation with PEEP in patients with severe acute lung disease [8]. Meanwhile, McIntyre et al. [9] had studied and published first results on using 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP in five patients with acute lung disease. Both studies showed marked improvements in arterial  $\text{PO}_2$ . McIntyre et al. [9], who had studied the addition of 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP, did not find a decrease in cardiac output, whereas Kumar et al. [8], using 13 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, showed a decrease in cardiac output averaging 15% of control.

On the basis of H.K. Beecher’s (1933!) finding of collapsed pulmonary gas spaces after upper abdominal surgery [10] and of the already mentioned investigations by Frumin et al. [5], Henning Pontoppidan at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston hypothesized that the impaired pulmonary oxygenation in acute lung disease

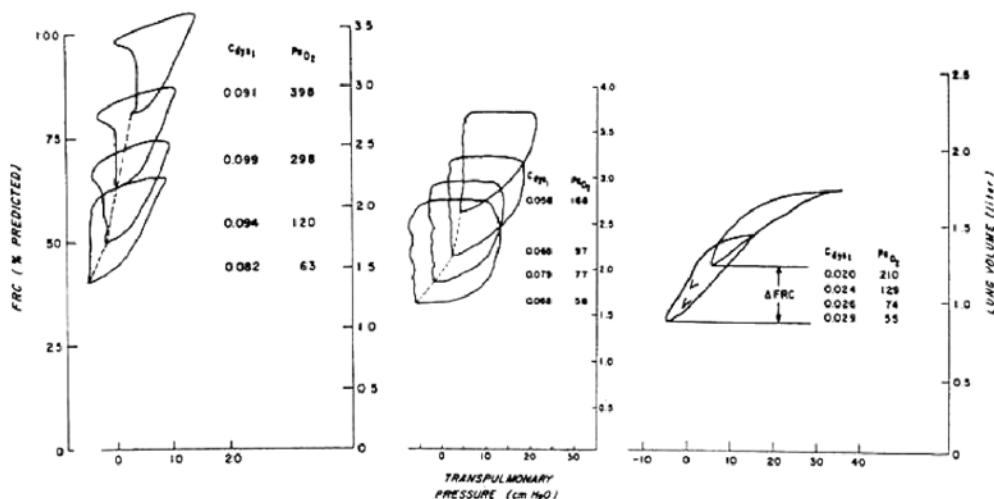
might be due to reduced lung volume or functional residual capacity (FRC), and that the improvement in arterial oxygenation with PEEP, which could indeed be quite dramatic, should correlate with changes in the FRC. Hence the group in Boston went on to investigate how the stepwise increase of PEEP from zero to 5 and 10 and further on to 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O would lead to an increase in the FRC and an associated improvement in  $\text{PaO}_2$  [11]. They also hypothesized that if recruitment of closed gas spaces in the lung takes place, this should be associated with an improvement in lung compliance. They found that this was indeed true; however, if the so-called dynamic or semistatic pulmonary compliance ( $C=V_T/P_{AW\ insp-exp}$ ) was determined, it was found that this parameter would only increase with lower levels of PEEP—with higher levels lung and total thoracic compliance would fall, indicating overdistention of pulmonary gas spaces (Fig. 3) [11, 12]. In fact, they found that lung volume (FRC) was markedly decreased in ARDS, and on the basis of their findings on compliance they proposed that PEEP improves arterial oxygenation by recruitment of collapsed alveoli [11, 13]. However, they were surprised that improvements in  $\text{PaO}_2$  could go along with a decrease in compliance (Fig. 3). Today we understand that recruitment and overdistention of pulmonary gas spaces may take place simultaneously.

While the early PEEP studies in Boston were coming to an end, Peter Suter and Berrie Fairley in San Francisco had also started working on the interactions of PEEP and compliance. They found that if mechanical ventilation takes place within the pulmonary pressure/volume range associated with maximum compliance, the negative effect of PEEP on cardiac output is at its minimum.



**Fig. 2** Myron B. Laver MD as Professor at the Department of Anesthesia at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston around 1970. Later he became chairman at the Department of Anaesthesia at the Kantonsspital in Basel. He was very enthusiastic about the hemodynamic effects of PEEP, especially in cardiogenic pulmonary edema. He believed that PEEP should improve cardiac output due to reductions in pre- and afterload if left ventricular function is compromised. The graph shows all the measurements of cardiac

output carried out by Kumar et al. [8] and Falke et al. [11]. M. Laver used to tell the story of the trumpet player whose cardiac angina was relieved when he played his trumpet, presumably due to the continuous positive airway/thoracic pressure applied. Today we know that PEEP usually does not increase cardiac output, but due to its decreasing effect on pre- and afterload, reducing myocardial wall stress, it may improve left ventricular function



**Fig. 3** Pressure–volume loops with four levels of endexpiratory pressure (zero, 5, 10 and 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) in three patients with ARDS [11]. The horizontal axis represents the transpulmonary pressure and the vertical axis the lung volume in liters or percent of predicted. The FRC was measured with helium dilution technique, the  $\Delta$ FRC and the pressure–volume loops were determined using

pneumotachography. These examples all show increasing lung compliance in the lower parts and decreasing lung compliance in the upper parts of the pressure–volume relationships, the latter indicating overdistension of the lungs. Nevertheless PaO<sub>2</sub> improved with all levels of PEEP

In fact, in their group of patients the level of PEEP which led to the best compliance coincided with the maximum O<sub>2</sub> transport (cardiac output × arterial O<sub>2</sub> content). They called this level of PEEP “best PEEP” [14]. In a later study they demonstrated that the combination of large tidal volumes with high levels of PEEP led to marked falls in compliance, indicating that such combinations of ventilator settings could be detrimental to lung function parameters [15].

The various studies by Falke et al. and Suter et al. clearly showed more than 20 years ago that in ARDS patients lung volume and compliance are markedly reduced, and that mechanical ventilation with high tidal volumes applied on top of PEEP may lead to overdistension of the lungs. Even at that time the conclusion should have been that *low* tidal volumes adjusted to the *low* lung volume in combination with relatively high PEEP are the settings of the ventilator which can be expected to be least detrimental to lung function. In fact, in the early 1970s Myron B. Laver had proposed the use of low tidal volumes together with relatively high PEEP and high respiratory frequencies, a type of mechanical ventilatory support which he called “pressure panting.” However, at that time our attempts to lower tidal volumes in mechanically ventilated patients already suffering from severely compromised pulmonary oxygenation were inhibited by the observation that the PaO<sub>2</sub> would fall even

further. This anecdotal observation was recently confirmed by the US ARDS Network study on low versus high tidal volume. After 1980 pulmonary CT scanning of critically ill patients was introduced by Rommelsheim [16]. This new diagnostic approach helped to improve our understanding of the pathophysiological scenario of ARDS, which was very well characterized by Gattinoni and Pesenti in 1987 [17] as the so-called “baby lung concept.” Subsequently it became obvious that overdistension of the lungs as indicated by a decreased compliance could be extremely harmful, contributing to what it is now called “ventilator-induced or ventilator-associated lung injury.” Another voice in the wilderness came from Theodor Kolobow and colleagues in 1980, who developed the most consistent strategy of lung-protective respiratory support, advocating “extracorporeal gas exchange with low frequency (pressure limited) mechanical ventilation” [18]. Most recently, it was firmly established by the already mentioned large multicenter trial that low tidal volume in conjunction with PEEP is the only suitable approach by which to prevent iatrogenic lung injury [19]. Although today we believe we have evidence that mechanical ventilation is best tolerated if it takes place in between the lower and the upper inflection points of the static pressure volume relationship of the diseased lungs, the question of how to determine the optimal level of PEEP is still disputed.

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Björn Jonson

# Elastic pressure-volume curves in acute lung injury and acute respiratory distress syndrome

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**Abstract** *Background:* The principal features of elastic pressure-volume curves of lungs or the respiratory system ( $P_{el}/V$  curves) recorded during reexpansion of collapsed lungs and subsequent deflation have been known since the 1950s. In acute respiratory failure and acute respiratory distress syndrome such curves have recently attracted increasing interest because new knowledge can be acquired from them, and because such curves may be useful as guidelines in setting the ventilator so as to avoid ventilator-induced lung injury.

*Discussion:* This article reviews recording methods, underlying phys-

iology and utility of  $P_{el}/V$  curves in research and clinical work.

**Keywords** Monitoring · Respiratory physiology · Mechanics

## Introduction

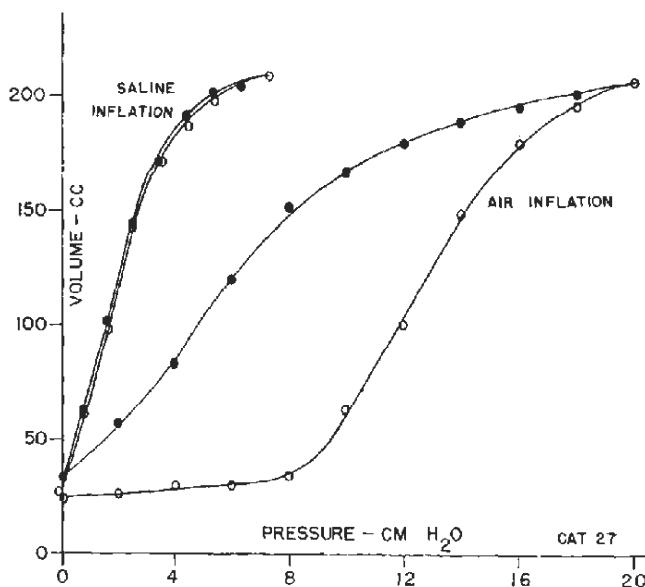
The relationship between elastic recoil pressure and volume ( $P_{el}/V$ ) when a collapsed isolated lung in health is reinflated was studied as early as the 1950s by Mead et al. [1] and Radford [2]. They observed that lung units “pop open” during the irregular reexpansion of the lung, and that the elastic recoil pressure during inflation with air is much higher than during emptying (Fig. 1). Emptying occurred more uniformly over the lung. They explained that one reason for the higher elastic pressure during insufflation is that a particular volume was shared by fewer open lung units than emptying. When the lung was inflated with saline, no hysteresis was observed. Obviously surface forces have a large influence on the  $P_{el}/V$  curves, a fact that was later misinterpreted, as is discussed below. The seminal study by Mead et al. [1] demonstrates that some basic concepts relating to collapse/recruitment of

lung units and the  $P_{el}/V$  loop were known and understood as early as the 1950s! Development with respect to measurement technique and mathematical analysis, understanding of physiology, and clinical utility of the  $P_{el}/V$  curve has progressed since that time, as is described in this review.

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## Technical development with respect to intensive care medicine

The development of the specialty of intensive care medicine that took off in the early 1970s was closely linked to new facilities for recording physiological events. Dynamic pressure volume loops were recorded in patients with acute severe respiratory failure in a study by Falke et al. in 1972 [3]. The supersyringe introduced by Harf et al. [4] in 1975 was an innovation of great significance and



**Fig. 1** Pressure-volume loops from an isolated cat lung that was reinflated from a degassed state, with air and with saline [2]

enabled more detailed studies of static  $P_{el}/V$  loops. The ServoVentilator 900 first marketed in 1971 comprised transducers for airway pressure and flow allowing studies of mechanics without disconnection of the patient from the ventilator [5]. Much later this facility was used for recording static  $P_{el}/V$  curves based upon the flow interruption method [6, 7, 8, 9]. This method uses interruption of study breaths at varying volume. The study breaths are separated by some ordinary breaths and are followed by a pause during which static  $P_{el}$  is measured. A potential problem with this method is the assumption that end-expiratory volume remains constant following each exhalation. Recruitment during the larger breaths causes an error if the recruited volume is not lost during the interposed normal breaths.

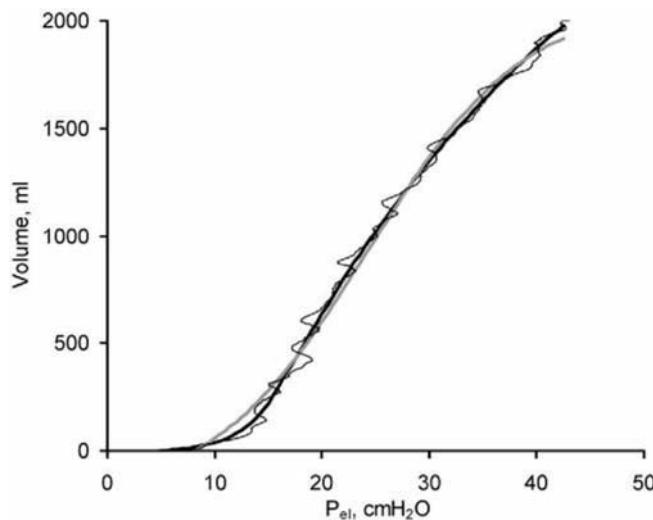
The constant inspiratory flow or the pulse method for recording inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves was introduced by Suratt and Owens [10] in 1980. Compliance of the respiratory system was accurately calculated by dividing the constant flow rate ( $L/s$ ) by the rate of pressure increase ( $\text{cmH}_2\text{O/s}$ ). A low inspiratory flow rate minimized the importance of resistance. By applying the complementary principle to measure resistance and subtracting the resistive pressure to obtain  $P_{el}$  Servillo et al. [11] showed that dynamic  $P_{el}/V$  curves, which are equivalent to static  $P_{el}/V$  curves, could be determined in a few seconds in critically sick patients. Finally, implementing sinusoidal flow modulation a computer-controlled ServoVentilator 900 (ServoVentilator 900C, Siemens-Elema, Solna) allowed fully automated recording of inspiratory and now also expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves in less than 0.5 min [12, 13, 14].

Gas exchange may cause artifacts in  $P_{el}/V$  recordings [15]. During insufflation the  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{O}_2$  exchanged roughly balance each other. During recording of expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves only  $\text{O}_2$  uptake continues. This leads to a volume loss not detected by integration of flow rate at airway opening. To reduce the artifact caused by gas exchange the time for expiration should be minimized. This is carried out both with the flow interruption technique for static curves and with the low flow modulation technique for dynamic curves. Gattinoni et al. [16] have underlined how artifacts may affect  $P_{el}/V$  recordings, and how they may be corrected. Still the exchange of  $\text{O}_2$ ,  $\text{CO}_2$ , heat, and humidity can be avoided completely only using body plethysmography, which is applicable only in experimental work [8].

During recording of dynamic expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves flow limitation often occurs towards the end of expiration down to the elastic equilibrium volume. Then resistance depends upon driving pressure and increases towards infinity at low volumes. When resistance has no defined value, the subtraction of resistive pressure is not feasible. If flow rate is reduced to very low values, flow limitation occurs only very late during expiration. However, problems related to gas exchange increase if expiration is exceedingly prolonged.

A mathematical description of the  $P_{el}/V$  curve facilitates objective analysis of results. A model by Venegas et al. [17] describes with four parameters a sigmoid that is symmetrical with respect to one upper and one lower curvilinear segment without a liner segment between them. However, an inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve is often characterized by a linear segment between the upper and lower nonlinear segments (Fig. 2). Furthermore, the upper and lower segments represent different physiological phenomena. There is hardly any reason to assume that they are symmetrical, and in reality they are not. The algorithm of Venegas et al. can be improved by adding one more coefficient to allow nonsymmetrical upper and lower segments [18]. A six-parameter model was developed to allow a comprehensive description of a non-symmetrical curve with a middle, strictly linear segment [19, 20]. Four parameters describe the coordinates of the linear segment and the two others the minimum and maximum volumes at which compliance of the extrapolated curve would fall to zero. The parameters of the noncontinuous, nonlinear equation are calculated with a numerical method available, for example, in Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, Wash., USA). A precise mathematical description of the curve is normally obtained (Fig. 2).

In contexts in which the detailed shape of the  $P_{el}/V$  curve is an issue the six-parameter model has obvious advantages. In other situations the four-parameter model may well serve its purpose. In spite of an excellent fit one needs to be warned against uncritical physiological interpretation of the parameters of any equation. Although



**Fig. 2** Thin line Elastic  $P_{el}/V$  curve recorded with the low flow inflation method; smooth black line curve according to Svantesson et al. [19, 20]; gray line curve according to Venegas et al. [17]. The symmetrical nature of the latter implies that the curvature is exaggerated in the upper segment and underestimated in the lower. Obviously both fits have very high  $R^2$  values

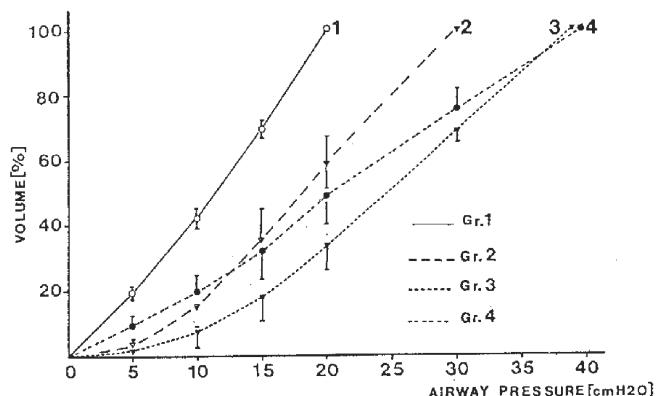
the parameters were originally based upon physiological concepts, the values, for example, for lower (LIP) and upper (UIP) inflection points have complex physiological significance, as is discussed below.

## Physiology

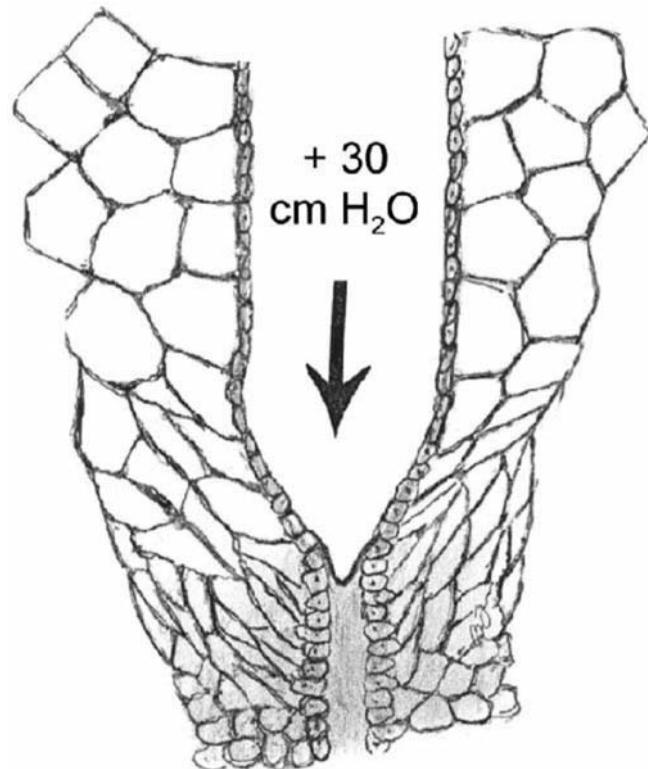
In the pioneering study by Falke et al. [3] dynamic  $P_{el}/V$  loops from different levels of positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) showed that recruitment was maintained by PEEP. Furthermore, increasing compliance during insufflation, later referred to as the LIP, was considered to represent recruitment of terminal airspaces. When PEEP was increased from 10 to 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, compliance fell as a sign of “overdistension of open alveoli.”

Using the supersyringe Matamis et al. [21] in 1984 presented static  $P_{el}/V$  loops from patients at varying stages of acute respiratory failure and acute lung injury/acute respiratory distress syndrome (ALI/ARDS; Fig. 3). In acute stages high hysteresis indicated alveolar flooding. A pressure higher than LIP and above the zone of inflection was suggested as a guideline to set PEEP on the basis of observations of improved oxygenation when this was implemented. In late stages compliance and hysteresis were low and LIP was no longer evident; fibrotic changes had occurred. These observations and the interpretations are still of great significance.

As early as 1975 Suter et al. [22] suggested that by choosing an optimum PEEP the tidal volume could be confined within the part of the  $P_{el}/V$  curve with highest



**Fig. 3** Inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves from patients with nearly normal chest radiography (1), early progressive ALI/ARDS (2, 3), and late-stage ARDS (4). (From Matamis et al. [21])



**Fig. 4** Illustration of shear forces in the zone of lung opening, caused by stretching of densely distributed alveolar membranes, obliquely attached to bronchiolar basal membranes [26]. “At a transpulmonary pressure of 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O the pressure tending to expand an atelectatic region surrounded by a fully expanded lung would be approximately 140 cmH<sub>2</sub>O” [25]

compliance. This was later underlined by Roupie et al. [23]. The rationale would be to avoid derecruitment of lung below the LIP and overdistension above the UIP. In the first controlled study showing that lung-protective ventilation was associated with increased survival in

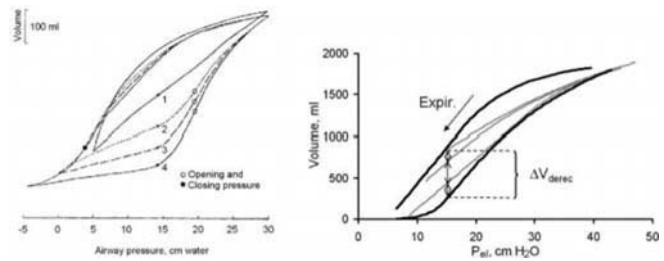
ARDS patients PEEP was set above the pressure at LIP to avoid derecruitment while plateau pressure was not higher than PEEP plus 20 cmH<sub>2</sub>O in order to avoid hyperinflation and barotrauma [24].

A basic concept in today's lung-protective ventilation goes back to 1970 when Mead et al. [25] and later Jonson [26] and explained that shear leads to extremely high local forces when a collapsed lung zone is recruited (Fig. 4).

In ALI/ARDS it has repeatedly been shown that recruitment is not limited to a narrow zone of pressure. Rather, it is a phenomenon that continues to high transpulmonary pressures [27, 28, 29, 30, 31]. The notation by Frazer et al. [29] that sequential opening of the lung contributes to an increased value of the slope of the inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve was later underpinned in theoretical studies [32, 33, 34]. Obviously volume change in a lung that undergoes recruitment reflects both distension of open units and recruitment of previously closed lung units when they "pop open":  $\Delta V = (\Delta V_{distension} + \Delta V_{recruitment})$ . Accordingly, recruitment contributes to compliance, C:  $C = (\Delta V_{distension} + \Delta V_{recruitment}) / \Delta P_{el}$ . It is noteworthy that a concept established by Mead et al. [1] in 1957 and so clearly demonstrated in the prominent articles referred to needed to be reiterated. Elegant experimental and clinical computed tomography studies have recently confirmed finally that recruitment is a process that continues throughout the insufflation to high airway pressures [28, 30]. The effect of continuing recruitment makes a single  $P_{el}/V$  curve difficult to interpret. The LIP reflects rather the onset of recruitment. The UIP may indicate the gradual cessation of recruitment rather than overdistension of the lung. It is worth pointing out that in patients with early severe acute lung injury the particularly high compliance corresponding to the steep part of the pressure-volume curve probably represents ongoing recruitment rather than an open lung. Titration of best PEEP should not be determined from compliance read from inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves.

In ARDS the  $P_{el}/V$  curve is dependent upon the volume history immediately preceding the recording [35]. Also in health this may be the case particularly in swine [36, 37]. Also in healthy anesthetized and paralyzed humans derecruitment of lung units occurring at zero airway pressure is reversed by a deep insufflation [38, 39].  $P_{el}/V$  curves performed before and after a recruitment maneuver are suitable for studying such phenomena. On the other hand, a standardized volume history, for example, a recruitment maneuver, is recommended to allow comparisons of  $P_{el}/V$  curves observed in different groups or situations.

Enhanced information has since long been obtained by recording multiple  $P_{el}/V$  curves at different levels of PEEP [3, 40]. The 1973 studies by Glaister et al. [40] of isolated dog lungs illustrate important principles which are actually applied in clinical studies (Fig. 5) [41]. In a



**Fig. 5** It took 30 years to go from dog lungs [40] to ARDS patients [41]. A family of inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves shows derecruitment at low expiratory airway pressure ( $\Delta V_{derec}$ ). The inspiratory curves merge at high pressures because of recruitment. Expiratory curves follow a common trajectory

study of ARDS by Ranieri et al. [42] showed in 1994 that recruitment at different PEEP levels can be studied using multiple inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves.

Jonson et al. [13] studied a group of patients with ALI using the computer-controlled ventilator in a mode that allows alignment of successive pressure-volume curves to the elastic equilibrium volume. Full recovery of volume loss caused by derecruitment during a single expiration at zero PEEP occurred during the following insufflation only after pressure was higher than 35 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. It was confirmed that the LIP indicated nothing more than onset of recruitment, and that compliance was increased during the process of recruitment.

The progressive derecruitment for each step of lower PEEP below 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O was quantified by recording a family of inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves in ALI/ARDS [20, 43]. In the modestly large groups of patients derecruitment was about equally large for each step of lower PEEP. Later a larger series indicated that this is not always the case (unpublished). Figure 5 shows an example in which derecruitment occurred mainly between 5 and 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. As is commonly observed, the merging inspiratory curves show that recruitment continued to about 40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O.

In dogs with oleic acid induced ARDS Pelosi et al. [30] gave a solid demonstration of the relationship between the inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve and recruitment as observed with computed tomography. Recruitment had just started at the LIP; it was prominent over the linear part of the  $P_{el}/V$  curve and continued to pressures above 40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. In an accompanying study of ARDS patients the same group showed a similarly wide range of opening pressure [28]. Closing pressures were widely distributed, but closing occurred in general at much lower pressures than opening. These data confirm previous conclusions drawn on the basis of  $P_{el}/V$  curve recordings. Accordingly, the information obtained from an inspiratory curve recorded from zero pressure is limited, while a family of  $P_{el}/V$  curves indicates the distribution of both opening and closing pressures of the lungs. This information is at-

tainable at the bedside without any other equipment than a computer-controlled ventilator.

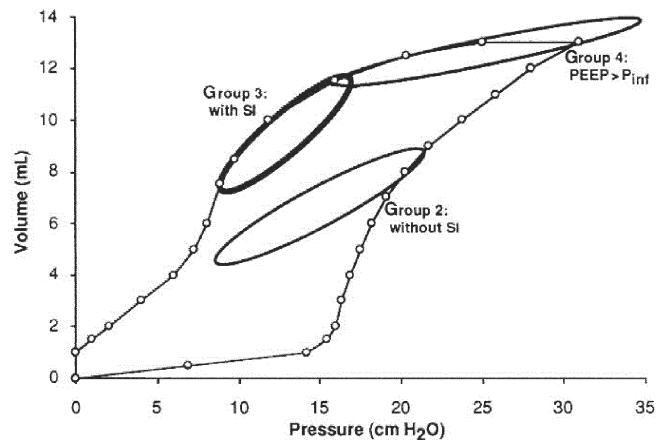
Recording of expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves is an alternative way to enhance information. The physiological significance of an expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve recorded from a pressure high enough to recruit the lung must then be considered. In its upper segment, before derecruitment has begun, it reflects elastic properties of the respiratory system. At lower pressures, when derecruitment has started, it is also influenced by expulsion of gas from collapsing lung units. Accordingly, the expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve is in principle affected by the same physiological factors as the inspiratory curve. Furthermore, in its lower part dynamic airway compression and flow limitation are sometimes additional factors making analysis of dynamic expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curves difficult. In any case, as collapse of lung units and flow limitation affects mainly the lower part of the expiratory curve, this curve gives a better indication of elastic properties than the inspiratory curve.

Various characteristics reflecting shape of the expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve have been suggested as indicators of closure of lung units and even as guidelines for setting PEEP [29, 40, 44]. However, this curve reflects a physiology as complex as the inspiratory curve. Overinterpretation, as that of the inspiratory LIP, should not be repeated.

Another aspect is that the expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve recorded from a pressure high enough to recruit the lung shows the highest volume that can be maintained at each pressure level. It may accordingly be regarded as a reference for other  $P_{el}/V$  curves. Benito et al. [45] showed as early as 1985 how expiratory compliance increases when measured after insufflations to higher and higher volumes. The hypothesis was confirmed that opening of previously closed units continues to occur, and that the increase in compliance reflects sequential opening of more units. Rimensberger et al. [46, 47] showed the usefulness of the expiratory curve recorded from a high pressure as a reference for  $P_{el}/V$  loops recorded under tidal volume ventilation (Fig. 6). While the inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve is affected by continuing recruitment over a wide range of pressure, the expiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve is affected by alveolar collapse only in its lower part. This was very recently emphasized in an elegant study by Downie et al. [48].

As shown in Fig. 5, the inspiratory curve recorded from the highest PEEP level falls closest to the expiratory curve. However, even the  $P_{el}/V$  curve recorded from a PEEP of 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O falls below the expiratory curve recorded from 50 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. This may reflect collapse of some lung units above this pressure or by other factors (see below).

In ARDS the hysteresis of  $P_{el}/V$  loops is reduced by PEEP because it attenuates collapse of lung units [49]. Static  $P_{el}/V$  loops show minimal hysteresis under conditions when lung closure and reopening does not occur,



**Fig. 6** Schematic drawing illustrating how in an ARDS animal model a large  $P_{el}/V$  loop was recorded from zero to 35 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. *Group 3* Ventilated at moderate PEEP after a recruitment maneuver, showing less damage than other groups. The  $P_{el}/V$  loop over the tidal volume was in this group situated at the expiratory limb of the large loop. (From [46])

either in health [6, 8, 12] or in disease [50]. These observations motivate reassessment of the common model of lung surfactant film hysteresis as an important source of  $P_{el}/V$  hysteresis of the lung. An even greater misconception related to surfactant and closure of lung units involves Laplace's law of elastic spheres. As Prange [51] notes, "The Y-tube model of alveolar inflation and the bunch-of-grapes model of alveolar anatomy deserves a place, not in our minds and textbooks, but in the museum of wrong ideas."

Hysteresis of dynamic  $P_{el}/V$  curves is caused in a complex way by resistance, viscoelastic behavior, and differences between closing and opening pressure of lung units. Even at low flow rates during recording of dynamic  $P_{el}/V$  loops and after subtraction of resistive pressure dynamic and static loops differ slightly because of viscoelastic phenomena in healthy pigs [12]. More data from patient studies are needed for proper interpretation of hysteresis of dynamic loops.

### Utility of $P_{el}/V$ curves in research and in the clinic

For about 50 years the recording of  $P_{el}/V$  curves has contributed to the understanding of the physiology of healthy and diseased lungs. At present we have come to the knowledge that a family of  $P_{el}/V$  curves estimate how much volume is lost by derecruitment for each step of lower PEEP, and how recruitment successively occurs with increasing pressures during insufflation (Fig. 5). Accordingly,  $P_{el}/V$  curves have given us substantial knowledge about the pathophysiology in ALI/ARDS with regards to the phenomenon of lung collapse and reopening. As this phenomenon is probably linked to ventilator-

induced lung injury, the knowledge obtained through  $P_{el}/V$  curves is one of the keys to improved treatment of patients with ALI/ARDS. Studies based upon recording of  $P_{el}/V$  curves have demonstrated how the maintenance of recruitment depends upon PEEP, tidal volume, and recruitment maneuvers [42, 52, 53]. Thus the lungs may be well recruited even at low tidal volume ventilation if PEEP is adequately high. In a proper context therefore PEEP is a major component of the open lung concept. How should this knowledge be applied to a particular patient?

In patients with ALI/ARDS a distinct LIP of an inspiratory  $P_{el}/V$  curve recorded from zero pressure indicates that derecruitment and recruitment are a threat with respect to ventilator-associated lung injury. PEEP should then be used and set at some value above the pressure at LIP. This strategy has long been applied [21, 23, 42] but has only recently been associated with improved outcome in a controlled study by Amato et al. [24]. As in the latter study, the setting of PEEP in relation to the LIP was not the only component of the tested strategy; a role of the

$P_{el}/V$  curve may be argued. Experimental evidence suggest that the role of PEEP in a lung protective strategy is important [54]. The  $P_{el}/V$  curve is used in only rather few centers, mainly in those with scientific interest in the topic. To tailor ventilation to the changing pathophysiology of the individual patient with respect to tidal volume, respiratory rate, and PEEP one would need the detailed information of multiple  $P_{el}/V$  curves or loops aligned to a common volume axis. In ALI/ARDS this should be repeatedly obtained to follow the course of the disease. Studies in both animal models and in patients show that this is feasible using computer-controlled ventilators [13, 14, 47, 55]. The recently released Hamilton Galileo Gold Ventilator represents a step forward (Hamilton Medical, Rhäzüns, Switzerland). When systems fulfilling the demands on versatility become generally available, it will be possible to develop new strategies and test them in large series of patients in multicenter studies. Only then it will be possible to define the optimal use of  $P_{el}/V$  curves for improving ventilation so as to avoid ventilator-induced lung damage.

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Antonio Pesenti

## The concept of “baby lung”

**Abstract** *Background:* The “baby lung” concept originated as an offspring of computed tomography examinations which showed in most patients with acute lung injury/acute respiratory distress syndrome that the normally aerated tissue has the dimensions of the lung of a 5- to 6-year-old child (300–500 g aerated tissue). *Discussion:* The respiratory system compliance is linearly related to the “baby lung” dimensions, suggesting that the acute respiratory distress syndrome lung is not “stiff” but instead small, with nearly normal intrinsic elasticity. Initially we taught that the “baby lung” is a distinct anatomical structure, in the nondependent lung regions. However, the density redistribution in prone position shows that the “baby lung” is a functional and not an anatomical

concept. This provides a rational for “gentle lung treatment” and a background to explain concepts such as baro- and volutrauma. *Conclusions:* From a physiological perspective the “baby lung” helps to understand ventilator-induced lung injury. In this context, what appears dangerous is not the  $V_T/kg$  ratio but instead the  $V_T/\text{“baby lung”}$  ratio. The practical message is straightforward: the smaller the “baby lung,” the greater is the potential for unsafe mechanical ventilation.

**Keywords** Acute respiratory distress syndrome · Baby lung · Baro-/volutrauma · Mechanical ventilation · Respiratory system compliance · Ventilator-induced lung injury

### Introduction

Adult respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) was first described in 1967 [1]. It is worth rereading the original paper as it clearly outlines the basic physiopathology and management problems which continue to be a matter of scientific debate. The 12 patients described there had ARDS of pulmonary and extrapulmonary origin, some with fluid overload and shock. Positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) was applied in five of them (three survived) and zero end-expiratory pressure (ZEEP) in the remaining seven (two survived). Respiratory system compliance ranged from 5 to 16 ml/cmH<sub>2</sub>O, all patients were hypoxic, and PCO<sub>2</sub> ranged from 22 to 69 mmHg. At autopsy the lungs were heavy (average 2110 g), and

microscopic examination revealed areas of alveolar atelectasis, interstitial and alveolar hemorrhage and edema, dilated and congested capillaries. Interestingly, PEEP was described as a “buying time maneuver,” preventing alveolar collapse at end-expiration.

How does the “baby lung” fit into this framework? The concept was introduced in the middle 1980s [2], but before discussing its place a brief history of the ARDS physiopathology and treatment is necessary. Some of the “new” concepts are nothing more than rediscoveries. Often, as new knowledge progresses, old knowledge is abandoned or forgotten.

## From the 1970s to the middle 1980s

To understand the progress of research in this period it is important to realize that the ultimate, undisputed target in ARDS patients was to maintain normal arterial  $\text{PCO}_2$  and  $\text{PO}_2$ . Maintaining normal  $\text{PCO}_2$  was not considered a problem, as it was common to use high pressure and volume ventilation, with tidal volume ( $V_T$ ) even exceeding 20 ml/kg. Actually the recommended standard care was  $V_T$  between 12 and 15 ml/kg [3]. The most common side effects were pneumothorax and pulmonary hyperinflation, collectively termed barotrauma [4, 5].

To improve  $\text{PaO}_2$  the key maneuver, after the report by Ashbaugh et al. [1], was to apply PEEP. To investigate its mechanism Falke et al. [6] first tested the effect of increasing PEEP from 0 to 15  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  in ten patients with ARDS. PEEP improved  $\text{PaO}_2$  linearly, and the putative mechanism was the prevention of alveolar end-expiratory collapse and/or airway closure. That study reported a decrease in lung compliance with high PEEP and variable hemodynamic responses, as in some patients cardiac output rose and in others it fell. It is important to recall that at that time the major concern with PEEP was the possible hemodynamic impairment caused by the increase in intrathoracic pressure.

In 1975 Suter et al. [7] published their investigation on the “optimum PEEP.” For the first time the relationship between lung mechanics and hemodynamics was approached in a structured fashion. Defining optimum PEEP as that which achieves not the best  $\text{PaO}_2$  but the best oxygen transport (cardiac output  $\times$  oxygen content), they found it to be associated with the highest compliance of the respiratory system. The hypothesis that was successfully tested, explicitly stated by the authors, is that the best compliance indicates that recruitment prevails over alveolar overdistension.

It is impossible to cite all the subsequent reports dealing with this concept, but in our opinion those that have introduced a new view of the problem were the ones by Lemaire et al. [8] and Kirby et al. [9]. Lemaire et al. [8] suggested that the “minimal PEEP” to keep the lung open is 2  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  higher than the lower inflection point on the inflation limb of the volume pressure curve [8]. At the other end of the spectrum stood Kirby et al. [9] who proposed the “super PEEP” concept, defined as the pressure that maximally reduces shunt (down to 20% at 20 torr) [9]. For many years beginning in the middle 1970s the overall picture can be summarized as follows: ARDS lungs were regarded as homogeneously heavy and stiff. To achieve normal  $\text{PCO}_2$  high volume and pressure ventilation was required, and to ensure normal oxygenation high  $\text{FIO}_2$  and PEEP were necessary, although the criteria for selecting PEEP were elusive. At that time the recognized side effects were ventilation-induced barotrauma, and the major concern was the hemodynamic impairment due to PEEP and high  $\text{FIO}_2$ .

A new perspective was opened by Hill et al. [10] who described the successful treatment of a young trauma patient with long-term membrane lung oxygenation. This led the National Institutes of Health in the United States to sponsor the first multicenter randomized trial on ARDS [11]: 42 patients were randomized to extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) and 48 to conventional care. Overall mortality in both groups was near 90%. To highlight the thinking at that time it is worth noting that both groups were treated with high-volume/pressure ventilation, and that the only difference was the lower  $\text{FIO}_2$  in the group receiving extracorporeal membrane oxygenation.

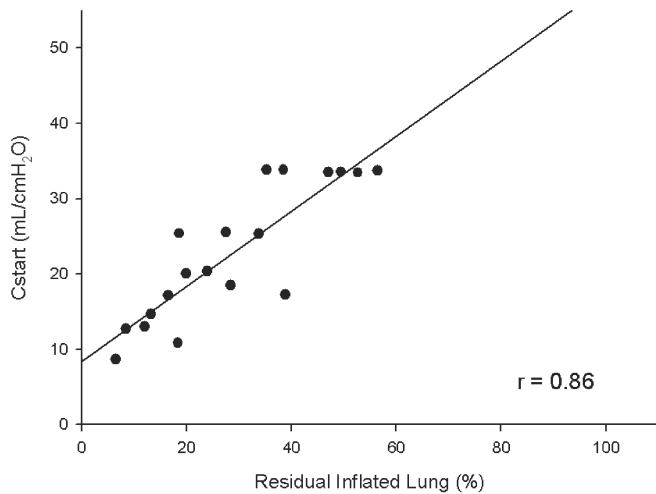
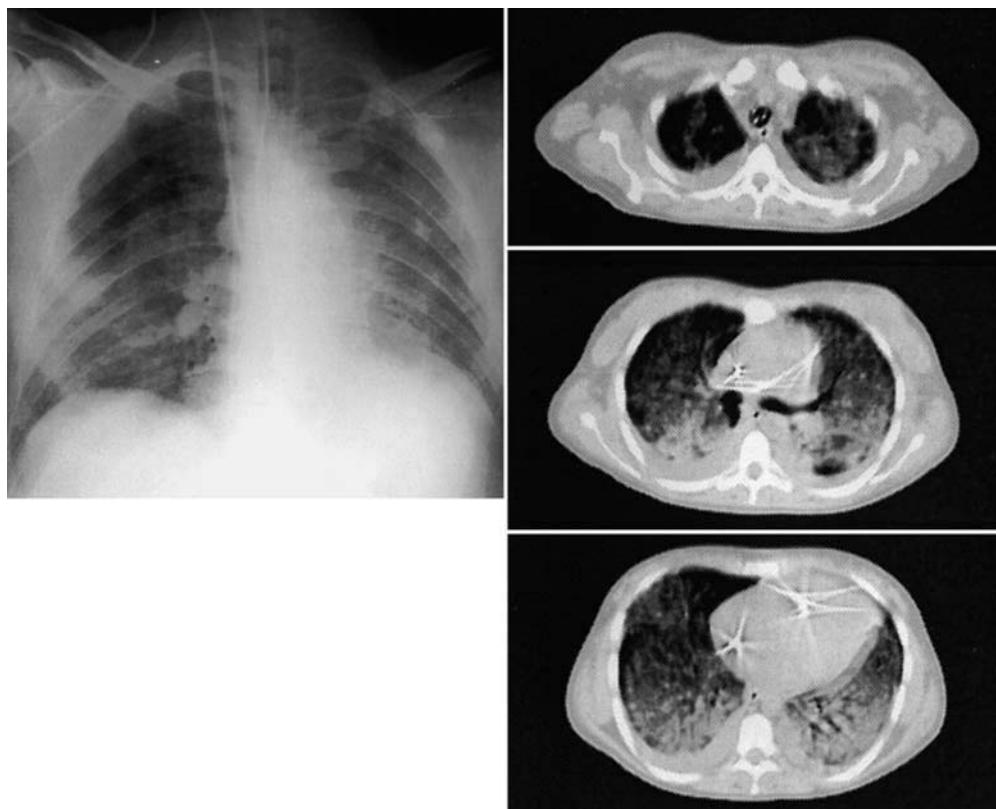
At about the same time, after extensive experimental work showing that it was possible to control breathing by extracorporeal removal of  $\text{CO}_2$  [12, 13, 14], we began to treat severe ARDS patients with this technique [15], the aim being to provide “lung rest” avoiding high-volume/pressure mechanical ventilation [16]. With this technique we could dissociate  $\text{CO}_2$  removal and oxygenation; the first was achieved with a low-flow venovenous extracorporeal membrane lung and the second by apneic oxygenation through the natural lungs which were kept substantially immobile, being ventilated with only 3/5 bpm. At that time we had no scientific rationale for the “lung rest,” except for the clinical observation of severe traumatic damage induced by high-volume/pressure ventilation. With extracorporeal  $\text{CO}_2$  removal the gas exchange targets were again, as in the early 1970s, normal  $\text{PCO}_2$  and normal  $\text{PO}_2$ .

## Middle 1980s: the “baby lung” concept

Surprisingly the first reports on computed tomography (CT) examinations appeared only in the middle 1980s [17, 18, 19]. CT dramatically changed our view of ARDS [20]. What was considered a “homogeneous lung,” as usually shown by anteroposterior radiography, appeared non-homogeneous on CT, with the densities concentrated primarily in the most dependent regions (Fig. 1). When we began a quantitative assessment of CT images, which measures the amount of normally aerated, poorly aerated, overinflated, and nonaerated tissue, we found that the amount of normally aerated tissue, measured at end-expiration, was in the order of 200–500 g in severe ARDS, i.e., roughly equivalent to the normally aerated tissue of a healthy boy of 5/6 years. From this finding came the concept of “baby lung,” as an offspring of CT examinations [2].

As expected, the amount of nonaerated tissue was correlated with the degree of hypoxemia, the shunt fraction, and pulmonary hypertension. What was absolutely new, however, was the finding that respiratory compliance was well correlated only with the amount of normally aerated tissue and not with the amount of nonaerated tissue

**Fig. 1** Anteroposterior chest radiography (*right*) and CT—apex, hilum, and base—(*left*) in ARDS from sepsis, taken at 5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O end-expiratory pressure. Chest radiography shows diffuse ground glass opacification, sparing the right upper lung. CT shows inhomogeneous disease and both the craniocaudal and sternovertbral gradients. (From Gattinoni et al. [20])

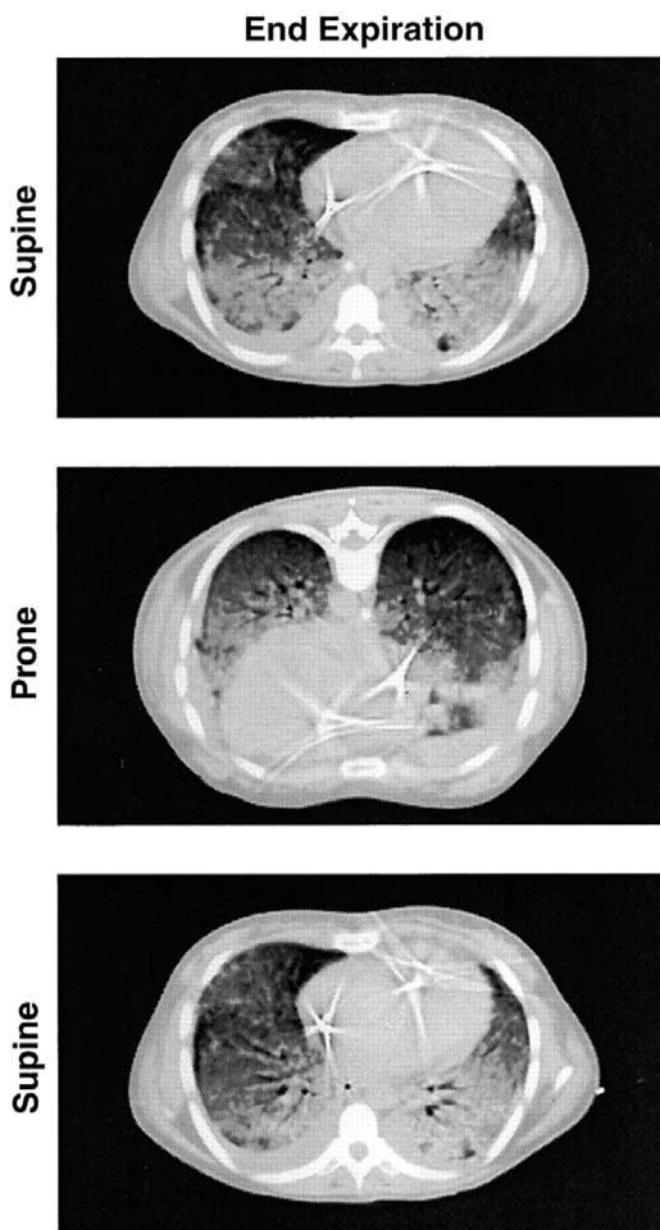


**Fig. 2** Starting compliance (*Cstart*) as a function of residual inflated lung expressed as percentage of the expected normal lung volume. (Redrawn from Gattinoni et al. [22])

[21]. In other words, compliance appears to “measure” the dimension of the “baby lung” [22] (Fig. 2). We then discovered that the ARDS lung is not “stiff” at all, but small, and that the elasticity of the residual inflated lung is nearly normal, as indicated by the specific tissue compliance (compliance/normally aerated tissue) [21, 23].

When we first elaborated these concepts, we believed that the “baby lung” was a healthy anatomical structure, located in the nondependent regions of the original lungs. This model helped account for the disaster observed during high-volume and pressure mechanical ventilation. It was easily understandable that ventilating the lung of a healthy child with, for example, 1000 ml V<sub>T</sub>, would destroy it. The relationship between the “baby lung” size and compliance explained why, on quite a large ARDS population with similar gas exchange impairment (referred to our hospital for extracorporeal support), only the patients with compliance below 20 ml/cmH<sub>2</sub>O (“baby lung” approx. 20% of the original lung) actually received extracorporeal assistance while the others, with similar gas exchange but better compliance, could be treated with alternative methods [16]. Moreover, the “baby lung” concept fitted neatly with the concept of volutrauma (straining of the “baby lung”) introduced by Dreyfuss et al. [24]. This helped provide a solid rational basis for trying to achieve “lung rest.”

As soon as we realized that the “baby lung” was located primarily in the nondependent lung regions, we started to use the prone position. The goal was to improve oxygenation by increasing perfusion of the anatomical “baby lung,” which was expected to be dependent in the prone position. Oxygenation did actually improve in the majority of patients. However, when we examined CT images in the prone position to confirm the theory [25], we found that the



**Fig. 3** CT of ARDS lung in supine (*upper*), prone (*middle*), and return to supine position (*lower*). The images were taken at end expiration and 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP. Note how gravity-dependent densities shift from dorsal to ventral within minutes when the patient is turned prone. (From Gattinoni et al. [20])

densities were redistributed in the dependent lung [26], thus demolishing the notion of the “baby lung” as a discrete, healthy anatomical structure (Fig. 3).

#### From “baby lung” to “sponge lung”

To understand the mechanism of lung density redistribution in the prone position we applied regional analysis,

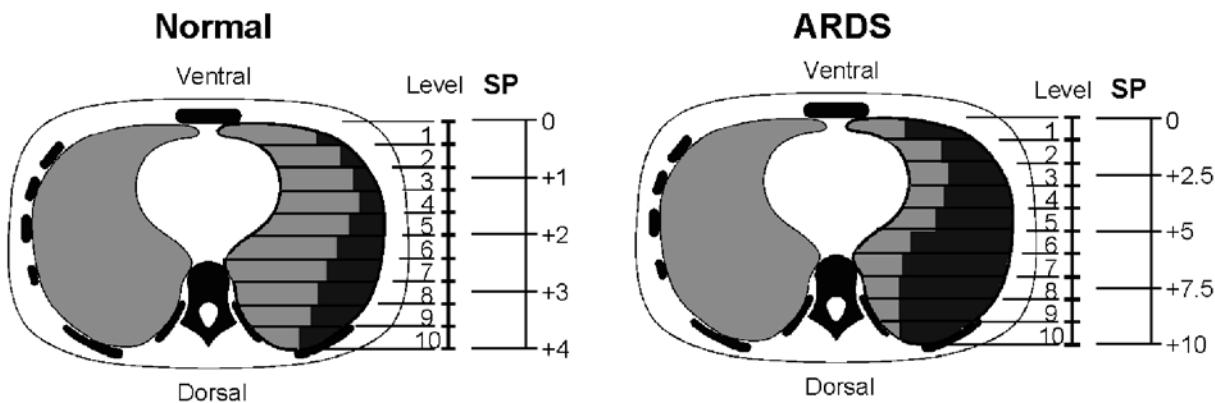
studying the lung composition along the sternum-vertebral axis [26, 27]. The main findings can be summarized as follows: all the lung parenchyma in ARDS is involved by the disease process, and the edema is evenly distributed from the sternum to the vertebra, i.e., not gravitationally, as observed previously [28, 29] and after [30, 31] *ex vivo* and in experimental animals. The increased lung weight, due to the accumulated edema, raises the hydrostatic pressures transmitted throughout the lung, which we called superimposed pressure. Consequently the gas in the dependent lung regions is squeezed out by the heavy lung parenchyma above (Fig. 4). The densities in the dependent lung regions are in fact due not to an increase in the amount of edema but to a loss of alveolar gases, as the result of the compressive gravitational forces, including the heart weight [32, 33].

This model, which Bone [34] called “sponge lung,” accounts, although not completely, for the redistribution of the lung densities in prone position: the superimposed hydrostatic pressure is reversed, and the ventral regions instead of the dorsal are compressed [35]. The sponge lung also partly explains the mechanism of PEEP: to keep open the most dependent lung regions PEEP must be greater than the superimposed pressure [23]. Unfortunately, this unavoidably leads to overdistension of the lung regions with lower superimposed pressure (Fig. 4). That superimposed pressure is the main cause of collapse was inferred from the human studies cited above and, years later, was directly confirmed experimentally in animals [36] although this view was challenged [37, 38]. In the context of “sponge lung” the “baby lung” still has value if considered from a functional, not an anatomical, perspective. In a broad sense the “baby lung” concept can be applied to any kind of ARDS as every patient has a reduced amount of normally aerated tissue.

The sponge lung model, however, implies different considerations. It assumes that the edema is evenly distributed throughout the lung parenchyma. While this is likely when the noxious stimulus leading to ARDS originates from the blood, i.e., all the lung parenchyma is exposed as in extrapulmonary ARDS, the picture may differ when the noxious stimulus comes from the airways, and distribution may possibly be nonhomogeneous (as in pulmonary ARDS) [39, 40]. This, however, remains to be verified, although CT differences between pulmonary and extrapulmonary ARDS have been reported [41, 42].

#### The “baby lung” at end-inspiration

New information was obtained, with further refinement of the model, when not only end-expiration but also end-inspiration was explored. We found that during inspiration part of the lung is recruited [43]. This has been shown in humans and in experimental animals both with [36, 44] and without CT [45]. These findings suggest the follow-



**Fig. 4** Schema representation of sponge model. In ARDS the “tissue,” likely edema in the early phase, is almost doubled in each lung level compared with normal, indicating the nongravitational distribution of edema. The increased mass, however, causes an

increased superimposed pressure (SP; cmH<sub>2</sub>O), which in turn leads to a “gas squeezing” from the most dependent lung regions. Superimposed pressure is expressed as cmH<sub>2</sub>O. (The values are taken from Pelosi et al. [27])

ing scheme (Fig. 5): the opening pressures are widely and normally distributed throughout the lung parenchyma both in humans and in experimental models, with the mode between 20 and 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O of airway pressure. Some lung regions, however—usually the most dependent—may require opening pressure up to 45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. It follows that during inspiration new tissue continuously opens to the plateau pressure. Of course, if the plateau pressure is limited, say, to 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, all collapsed tissue with a higher opening pressure stays closed throughout the entire respiratory cycle. At end-expiration the PEEP, if adequate, can keep open only the lung regions that were already opened by the plateau pressure [36, 44].

CT examinations at end-inspiration did in fact clearly focus the relationship between the end-expiratory and end-inspiratory pressures, which may be relevant and are discussed below in the context of the lung protective strategy. During inspiration the “baby lung” augments its own parenchyma through newly recruited tissue up to the inspiratory plateau pressure. This complicates the interpretation of the pressure/volume curve. In fact the amount of tissue explored between end-expiration and end-inspiration in ARDS is not the same as in the normal lung which simply inflates. In ARDS during inspiration the “baby lung” gains both gas and tissue, and the gas volume/pressure curve is similar to the recruitment/pressure curve [20].

### The “baby lung” and the protective lung strategy: changing the goals

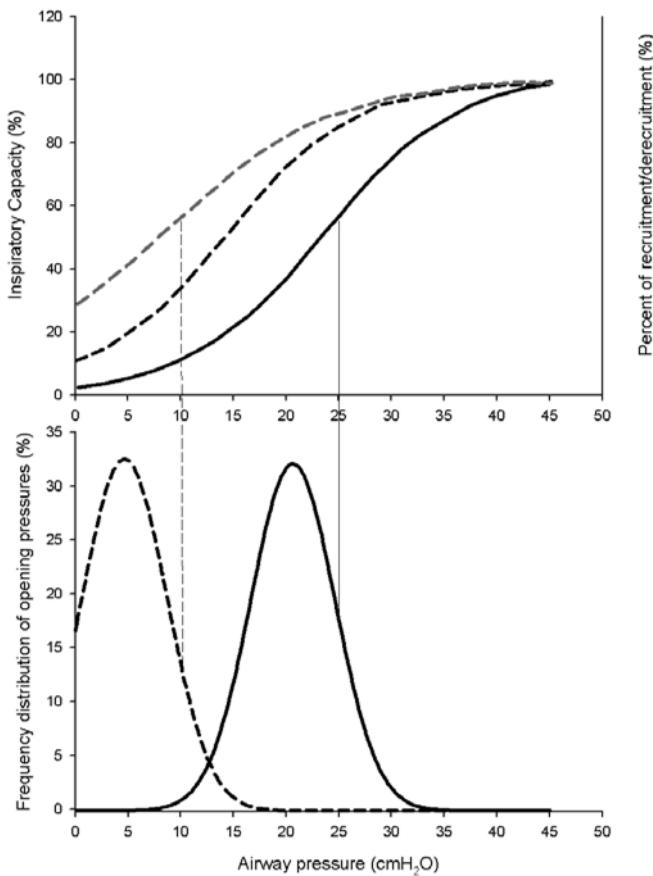
As discussed above, the concept of “baby lung” fully justified the goal of lung rest. With extracorporeal CO<sub>2</sub> removal we were able to fully provide lung rest, but at the price of the side effects of extracorporeal circulation (primarily bleeding). In the 1990s Hickling et al. [46] introduced low V<sub>T</sub> ventilation to “rest the lung.” This technique,

referred to as “permissive hypercapnia,” to underline the price paid for resting the lung, had been used with success in asthma patients [47]. In our opinion, however, *the real “revolution” was not the use of low tidal volume but the change of the goal*. For nearly 20 years this had been normal gas exchange, but from the 1990s the accepted target became gentle lung treatment while maintaining adequate oxygenation and accepting high PCO<sub>2</sub> [48].

### The “baby lung” and “VILI”

Anatomical and physiological basis of ventilator-induced lung injury

We recently reviewed the physical and biological triggers of ventilator-induced lung injury (VILI) [49] and briefly discuss them now in relation to the “baby lung.” The lung’s fibrous skeleton is the structure that bears the forces applied by mechanical ventilation. The skeleton consists of two fiber systems: an axial system which is anchored to the hilum and runs along the branching airways down to the alveolar ducts, and a peripheral system which is anchored to the visceral pleural that goes centripetally down into the lung to the acini. The two systems are linked at the level of the alveoli and form a continuum, the lung skeleton [50]. The anatomical units of the system are extensible elastin and inextensible collagen which is “folded” in the lung resting position (Fig. 6, left panel). The lung cells (epithelial and endothelial) do not bear the force directly but are anchored (via integrins) to the fibrous skeleton and must accommodate their shape when the skeleton is distended. The limits of distension are of course dictated by the inextensible collagen fibers, which work as a “stop-length” system. When the collagen fibers are fully unfolded, the lungs reach their maximal volume (total lung capacity) and further elongation is



**Fig. 5** Upper Percentage of inspiratory capacity (black lines; solid black line also percentage of recruitment) and percentage of derecruitment (dashed gray line) as function of airway pressure. Lower Frequency distribution of opening pressure as function of airway pressure (solid line) and of closing pressure (dashed line). Vertical lines Example of airway pressures used during mechanical ventilation, plateau pressure 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (solid line) and PEEP 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (dashed line). At 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O airway pressure nearly 60% inspiratory capacity, 40% of lung units are still closed. At 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP nearly 35% undergoes opening and closing. (Data from Crotti et al. [44])

prevented (Fig. 6, right panel). This is true for the whole lung as well as for each lung region, which has its own “total regional maximal capacity.”

When a force is applied by the ventilator, the fibers of the lung skeleton develop an internal tension (spatial molecular rearrangement), equal to but opposite the pressure applied to the fibers. The applied pressure is not the airway pressure but the transpulmonary pressure (PL), i.e., the airway pressure minus the pleural pressure. The fiber tension is called “stress.” In an elastic structure such as the lung skeleton, the stress is associated with elongation ( $\Delta L$ ) of the fibers from their resting position ( $L_0$ ), and this is called “strain” ( $\Delta L/L_0$ ). Stress and strain, indeed, are two faces of the same coin, and are linked as follows:  $stress=K \times strain$ , where K is Young’s module of the material [51].

If the stress exceeds the tensile properties of the collagen fibers up to “stress at rupture,” the lung undergoes the classical “barotrauma.” When the strain, without reaching the levels of physical rupture, is unphysiological (volutrauma), the macrophages, endothelial, and epithelial cells anchored to the lung skeleton are stretched abnormally [52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57], the mechanosensors are activated [58, 59, 60], cytokines are produced [61, 62, 63], and full-blown inflammation develops [64].

#### Stress and strain in the “baby lung”

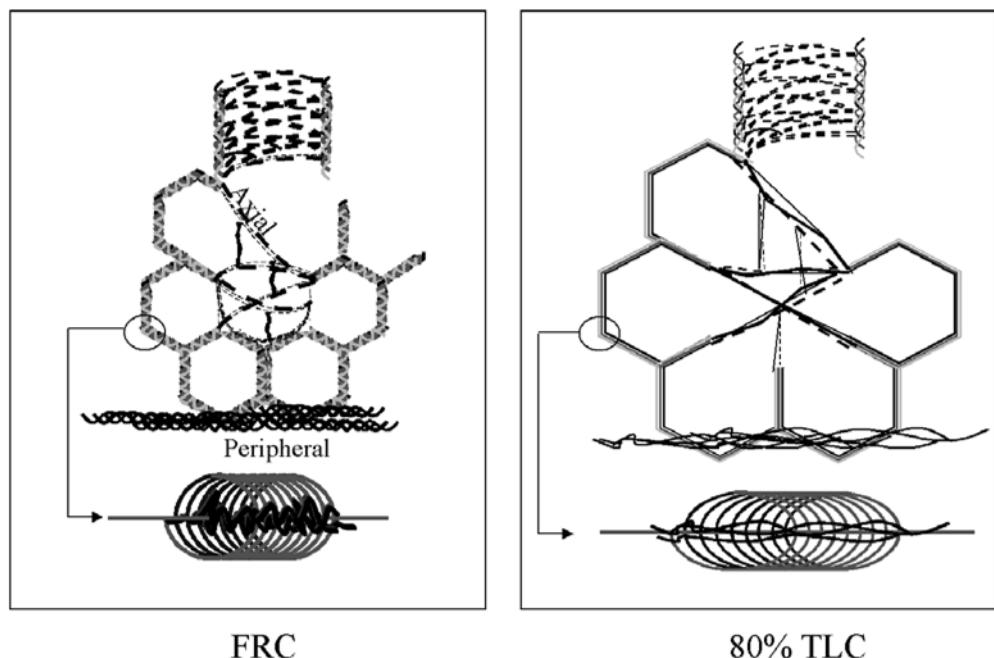
From this perspective, VILI is nothing more than the global/regional excessive stress and strain applied to the “baby lung.” The rough equivalent of the stress in the whole lung is the PL, while the equivalent of the strain is the change in the size of the lung from its resting position, i.e., the ratio of  $V_T$  to the size of the “baby lung” at end-expiration (ZEEP):  $PL(i.e. \ stress)=K \times [(V_T/baby \ lung)] (i.e. \ strain)$ . The link between stress and strain, K, is the specific lung elastance ( $E_{spec}=PL/V_T \times “baby \ lung”$ ), which is the pressure at which the “baby lung” (end-expiratory lung volume) doubles in size, i.e., when  $V_T/baby \ lung=1$ .

The issue is more complicated (but the overall concept does not change) when PEEP is applied. In fact, the effects of PEEP are twofold. On the one hand, PEEP may overdistend the already open lung, increasing stress and strain (i.e., the numerator of above equation increases). On the other hand, PEEP may keep open new lung portions, increasing the resting end expiratory lung volume (i.e., the denominator of the above equation increases, stress/strain decreases). The final effect should be detected in every patient, who may show varying amounts of recruitable lung.

We do not know the safe limits of mechanical ventilation, but they can be discussed against a physiological and anatomical background. In the normal lung doubling the resting volume occurs at approx. 80% of total lung capacity, and at this level of strain ( $V_T/end-expiratory lung volume=1$ ) most of the collagen fibers are unfolded, and PL equals the specific elastance, which is normally 12.5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. We found that specific elastance in the “baby lung” is near normal [21, 23]. If so, considering the upper limits of physiological strain between 0.8 and 1 as “safe” (although we do not know), the “safe” PL should not exceed the specific elastance (approx. 12–13 cmH<sub>2</sub>O).

To prevent VILI, by applying stress and strain within physiological limits, we must take the  $V_T/baby \ lung$  ratio, not the  $V_T/kg$  ratio. For example, in a 70-kg ARDS patient the “baby lung” dimension may be highly variable, say 200, 400, or even 800 ml. A 6 ml/kg  $V_T$  [65] applied to these different “baby lungs” would result in three different sets of global [stress and strain], i.e., [26.3 cmH<sub>2</sub>O and 2.1], [13.1 cmH<sub>2</sub>O and 1.1],

**Fig. 6** Disposition of fibers in an acinus. The particular shows the association of elastic fibers (spring) and collagen fibers (string). Left Relaxed state (FRC); right 80% TLC state. (Modified from Weibel [67])



[6.6 cmH<sub>2</sub>O and 0.5] respectively. Only the third set is within physiological limits.

If we eventually verify (work is in progress) that  $E_{spec}$  is constant or within narrow limits in ARDS, knowing either the PL or the “baby lung” dimension will be sufficient to tailor stress and strain, so that they remain within physiological limits. Unfortunately, none of the variables needed to estimate stress and strain are measured routinely in the ICU.

So far we have considered PL as a single value, but in fact it changes along the vertical axis of the lung. In supine position the PL gradient is steeper than in prone position [26]. This suggests that strain and stress are distributed more evenly in the prone position, and this is the rationale for its application in ARDS, independently of gas exchange, as we recently observed experimentally [66].

## Conclusion

The “baby lung” is a model, with all the limits inherent to models. However, it is useful for the interpretation of both

physiopathology and treatment. The “baby lung” is actually the “small” lung open at end-expiration; it may become larger during inspiration due to newly recruited tissue, according to the recruitment-pressure curve and the opening pressure distribution. The “baby lung” is not healthy but it is aerated. Its specific elastance, however, is usually near-normal. The smaller the “baby lung,” the greater the potential for VILI. Barotrauma (PL, stress) and the volutrauma-biotrauma ( $V_T$ /end-expiratory lung volume, strain) are linked to the “baby lung” by the following relationship, which clearly indicates that the smaller the “baby lung” the greater the stress/strain:  $PL = E_{spec} \times (V_T/baby\ lung)$ . The final message is straightforward: Treat the “baby lung” gently. Low PL, low  $V_T$ , and prone position are the means to hand today.

**Acknowledgements** We cannot list individually, but we are deeply indebted to the hundreds of incredible persons who have worked, contributed, and discussed with us over the past 30 years. Without them we could not have reached any result, great or small. Intensive care is founded not only on a “great idea” but on near-paranoid attention to detail and understanding of the minute-by-minute changes in patients’ physiology.

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## The effects of anesthesia and muscle paralysis on the respiratory system

**Abstract** *Background:* Oxygenation is impaired in almost all subjects during anesthesia, and hypoxemia for shorter or longer periods is a common finding. Moreover, postoperative lung complications occur in 3–10% after elective abdominal surgery and more in emergency operations. *Discussion:* Rapid collapse of alveoli on induction of anesthesia and more widespread closure of airways seem to explain the oxygenation impairment and may also contribute to postoperative pulmonary infection. Causative mechanisms to atelectasis and airway closure seem to be loss of

respiratory muscle tone and gas re-sorption. *Conclusion:* Avoiding high inspired oxygen fractions during both induction and maintenance of anesthesia prevents or reduces atelectasis, while intermittent “vital capacity” maneuvers recruit atelectatic lung regions.

**Keywords** Anesthesia · Mechanical ventilation · Atelectasis · Airway closure · Shunt

### Introduction

Anesthesia during mechanical ventilation is administered to 10–15 million patients per year in the countries of the European Union. A frequent finding is impaired oxygenation, despite the administration of 30–40% oxygen in the inspired gas. Increased alveolar-arterial oxygen tension difference ( $P_{A-a}O_2$ ) is therefore seen in 90% or more of anesthetized patients [1]. This holds true for all anesthetic regimes, whether intravenous or inhalational agents are used, and whether the patient is breathing spontaneously or is ventilated mechanically [2]. Moreover, postoperative pulmonary complications occur in 3–10% of patients undergoing elective abdominal surgery [3, 4], and more in emergency surgery. To what extent postoperative complications are caused by a respiratory dysfunction during anesthesia is not clear. However, atelectasis that develops during anesthesia remains in the postoperative period, and impairment in arterial oxygenation and decrease in forced spirometry are correlated with the size of the atelectasis [5]. Moreover, in view of

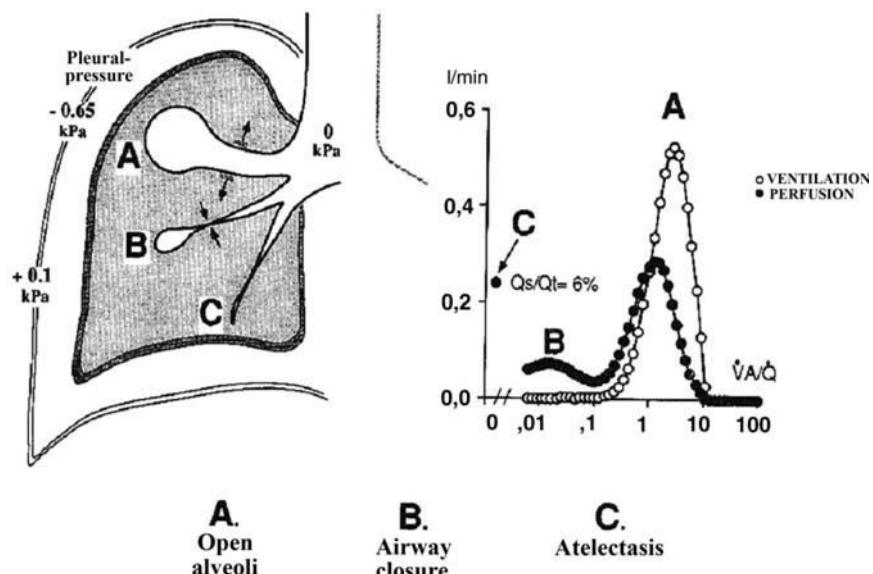
the large number of anesthesias that are given in the Western world even a moderate complication rate will have considerable social and economic consequences.

This review examines the morphological and functional causes of impaired oxygenation that is regularly seen during anesthesia and mechanical ventilation.

### Gas exchange

Shunt, as calculated from arterial, mixed venous, and alveolar  $PO_2$  [6], increases from 1–2% in the waking subject to 8–10% in the anesthetized patient [1]. The standard shunt equation is based on the assumption of two populations of alveoli, those that are “ideally” perfused in proportion to their ventilation and those that are perfused but not at all ventilated (the shunt). However, the lung does not contain two populations of alveoli only. There are a number of units with less ventilation than perfusion, with low ventilation-perfusion ratios (“low  $V_A/Q$  regions”), as well as units that are ventilated in excess of

**Fig. 1** Right Ventilation-perfusion matching ( $V_A/Q$ ) in an anesthetized subject. Note the large normal mode centered on a  $V_A/Q$  ratio of 1, as well as a low  $V_A/Q$  mode with  $V_A/Q$  ratios between 0.01 and 0.1, and finally shunt ( $V_A/Q=0$ ). *Left*: The morphological and functional correlates with intermittent airway closure explaining low  $V_A/Q$  and atelectasis explaining the shunt



their perfusion ("high  $V_A/Q$  regions"). Perfusion of low  $V_A/Q$  regions also impedes the oxygenation of blood and to a varying extent is included in the calculated "shunt." The shunt, as measured by the standard oxygen technique, should therefore rather be called "venous admixture" [1]. A good correlation between venous admixture and the sum of "true" shunt and perfusion of "low  $V_A/Q$  regions" was seen in a study of 45 anesthetized subjects [7].

The extent by which venous admixture includes low  $V_A/Q$  regions depends on the inspired oxygen fraction ( $FIO_2$ ). The higher it is, the less of low  $V_A/Q$  is included. However, with high  $FIO_2$  the regions with low  $V_A/Q$  collapse because of gas adsorption and be transformed to shunt regions [8, 9].

A more detailed picture of the distribution of  $V_A/Q$  ratios with no need to change  $FIO_2$  can be obtained by the multiple inert gas elimination technique [10]. This technique is based on the infusion of a number of inert gases (usually six) in a vein and the calculations of the retention (arterial/mixed venous concentration ratio) and excretion (mixed expired/mixed venous concentration ratio) of each gas. The ratios, together with the measured solubilities of the inert gases, enable the construction of a virtually continuous distribution of ventilation and perfusion against  $V_A/Q$  ratios.

When this technique is applied to the anesthesia setting, a major finding is increased dispersion of  $V_A/Q$  with the appearance of low  $V_A/Q$  ratios. Thus there is impaired matching of ventilation and perfusion during anesthesia with regions that are poorly ventilated in relation to their perfusion. Another major observation is the appearance of true shunt of around 8%, but frequently exceeding 20% [11, 12, 13]. Figure 1 presents an example of a  $V_A/Q$  distribution. Thus there seem to be at least two major functional causes of impaired oxygenation during an-

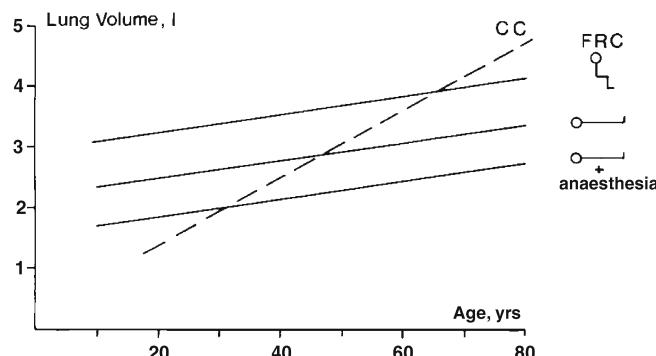
esthesia, low  $V_A/Q$  and true shunt. The morphological correlates are be discussed below.

### Hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction

Attenuation of hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction (HPV) is frequently considered a mechanism of impaired gas exchange during anesthesia. Most inhalational anesthetics inhibit HPV in isolated lung preparations [14]. However, no such effect has been seen with intravenous anesthetics (barbiturates) [15]. Results from human studies vary, reasonably explained by the complexity of the experiment that causes several variables to change at the same time. In studies with no gross changes in cardiac output the inhalational anesthetics isoflurane and halothane depress the HPV response by 50% at twice the minimum alveolar concentration [16]. The HPV response acts efficiently both in the atelectatic lung (where HPV seems to be more important than mechanical kinking of vessels) and during ventilation with hypoxic gases [17].

The breathing of pure oxygen may increase the shunt by promoting alveolar collapse [18]. High  $FIO_2$  may also increase shunt by increasing alveolar  $PO_2$  and thus attenuate the HPV response [16]. Similarly, pulmonary hypertension counters HPV, presumably by requiring higher muscle force to constrict a vessel.

It should also be emphasized that attenuation of the HPV response cannot be the only disturbance during anesthesia to cause gas exchange impairment. If there were no corresponding ventilatory impediment, loss of pulmonary vascular tone would be of no significance since adequate gas exchange would still occur. Loss of HPV can only aggravate an existing  $V_A/Q$  mismatch.



**Fig. 2** Functional residual capacity (FRC) and closing capacity (CC, the lung volume at which airways begin to close during expiration). Note the decrease in FRC from sitting or standing to supine and the further decrease with anesthesia. Note also the slight increase in volumes with age, an effect of loss of elastic tissue in the lung (as well as elsewhere in the body). Note also the much faster increase in CC with age, making airway closure more common in elderly. Airway closure during a breath occurs at ages of 30 years and more in the supine anesthetized subject

### Lung volume and respiratory mechanics

The resting lung volume (functional residual capacity, FRC) is reduced by 0.8–1.0 l by changing body position from upright to supine, and there is another decrease by 0.4–0.5 l when anesthesia is induced [19]. The end-expiratory lung volume is thus reduced from approx. 3.5 to 2 l, the latter being close or equal to residual volume. When one tries to breathe voluntarily at that level, one realizes the difficulty in doing so! The decrease seems to be related to loss of respiratory muscle tone, shifting the balance between the elastic recoil force of the lung and the outward forces of the chest wall to a lower chest and lung volume [20, 21]. Maintenance of muscle tone, such as during ketamine anesthesia, does not reduce FRC [22]. The effect of body position and anesthesia on FRC is shown in Fig. 2. As seen here, FRC increases with age. This is dealt with below.

Compliance of the respiratory system (lungs and chest wall) is also reduced during anesthesia, from a mean of 95 to 60 ml/cmH<sub>2</sub>O [23]. This may be due mainly to decreased lung compliance [23]. Rehder and coworkers [24] ruled out direct effects of the anesthetic on the lung tissue, and it is more likely that the fall in compliance is a consequence of the reduced FRC. This promotes airway closure and atelectasis, as is discussed below.

The resistance of the respiratory system and of the lungs has also been measured, showing considerable increase during both spontaneous breathing and mechanical ventilation [23, 24]. However, studies on resistance during anesthesia have been hampered by different experimental conditions during the awake and the anesthetized conditions. Thus studies that enable comparison of resistance under both isovolume and isoflow conditions are

still lacking. It is rather likely that the increased lung resistance merely reflects the reduced FRC.

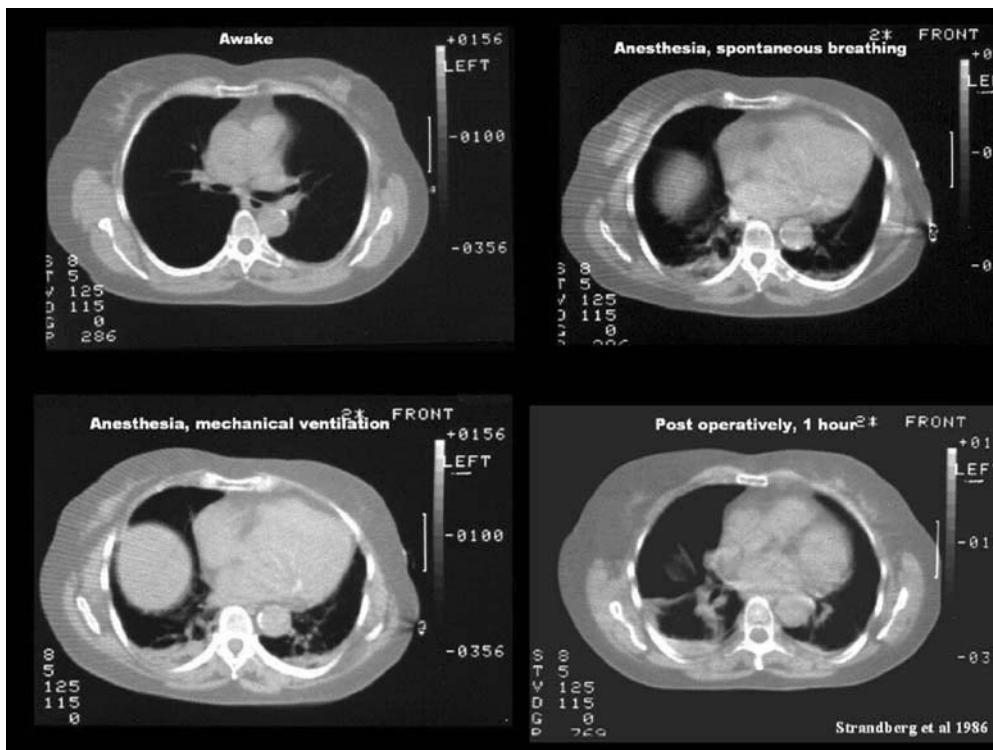
### Atelectasis

In their classical study in 1963 Bendixen and coworkers [25] proposed “a concept of atelectasis” as a cause of impaired oxygenation during anesthesia. They had observed a subsequent decrease in compliance of the respiratory system and a similar subsequent decrease in arterial oxygenation in both anesthetized humans and experimental animals. This was interpreted as the formation of atelectasis. However, other research groups who were unable to reproduce their findings noted a more rapid fall in compliance and PaO<sub>2</sub> on induction of anesthesia. Moreover, atelectasis could not be shown by conventional chest radiography.

In the middle 1980s new observations were made that may explain the altered function of the lung during anesthesia. Using computed tomography (CT) with transverse exposures of the chest Brismar and coworkers [26] demonstrated prompt development of densities in dependent regions of both lungs during anesthesia. Similar densities had previously been seen in anesthetized infants [27]. Morphological studies of these densities in various animals supported the diagnosis of atelectasis [28]. An example of atelectasis as shown by CT is shown in Fig. 3.

Atelectasis appears in around 90% of patients who are anesthetized [7]. It occurs both during spontaneous breathing and after muscle paralysis and regardless of whether intravenous or inhalational anesthetics are used [2]. The atelectatic area on CT slice near the diaphragm is generally approx. 5–6% of the total lung area but can easily exceed 15–20%. It should also be remembered that the amount of tissue that is collapsed is even larger, the atelectatic area comprising mainly lung tissue whereas the aerated lung consists only of 20–40% tissue, the rest being air. Thus 15–20% of the lung is regularly collapsed at the base of the lung during uneventful anesthesia—before any surgery has been done! Abdominal surgery adds only little to the atelectasis, but it can remain for several days in the postoperative period [5]. It is likely to be a focus of infection and may contribute to pulmonary complications [29]. One should also note that after thoracic surgery and cardiopulmonary bypass more than 50% of the lung can remain collapsed even several hours after surgery [30]. The amount of atelectasis decreases towards the apex, which is mostly spared (fully aerated).

There is a weak correlation between the size of the atelectasis and body weight or body mass index [31], obese patients showing larger atelectatic areas than lean ones. While this was expected, it came as a surprise that the atelectasis is independent of age, with children and young persons showing as much atelectasis as elderly patients [7]. Another unexpected observation was that



**Fig. 3** Computed tomography in a subject when awake (upper left), during anesthesia with spontaneous breathing (upper right), after muscle paralysis (lower left), and 1 h postoperatively (lower right). Note the appearance of atelectasis already during spontaneous breathing during anesthesia with a slight further increase with mechanical ventilation (mainly explained by the end-expiratory exposure in the paralyzed subject whereas during spontaneous

breathing the exposure covers most of the breath). Note also that the anesthesia-induced atelectasis remains for some time in the postoperative period. The large gray area in the middle of the right lung field (to the left in the CT image) is the diaphragm and liver that have been moved cranially during anesthesia. (Redrawn from [23])

patients with chronic obstructive lung disease show less, or even no, atelectasis during the 45 min of anesthesia of study [32]. The mechanism that prevents the lung from collapsing is not clear, but it may be airway closure occurring before alveolar collapse takes place or an altered balance between the chest wall and the lung that counters a decrease in the lung dimensions.

There is a good correlation between the amount of atelectasis and pulmonary shunt as measured by the multiple inert gas elimination technique. The regression equation based on 45 patients studied during inhalational anesthesia has been calculated as: shunt=0.8 × atelectasis +1.7 ( $r=0.81$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), with atelectasis as a percentage of the lung area just above the diaphragm on CT and shunt as a percentage of cardiac output. Interestingly, shunt did not increase with age [7]. Combining CT and single photon emission computed tomography confirms the distribution of shunt and its location within the atelectatic area [33] (Fig. 4).

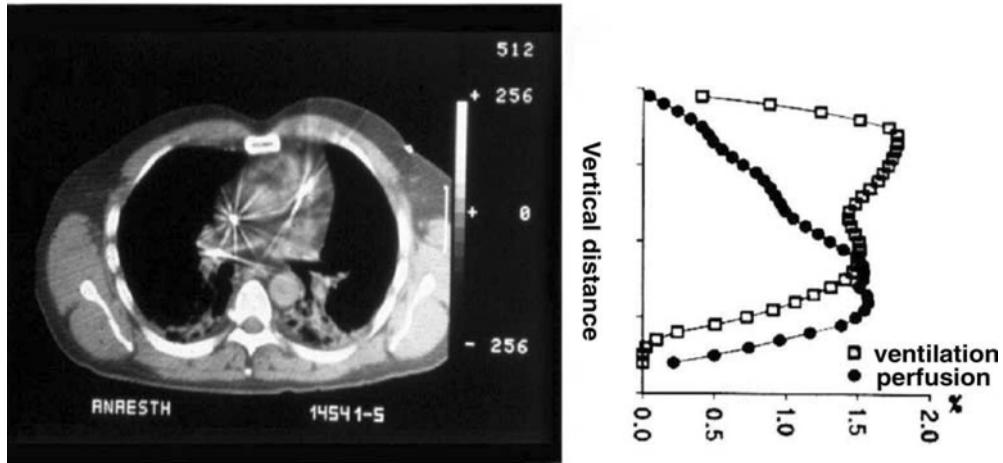
### Airway closure

In addition to atelectasis, intermittent closure of airways can be expected to reduce the ventilation of dependent lung regions. Such lung regions may then become “low  $V_A/Q$ ” units if perfusion is maintained or not reduced to the same extent as ventilation. Airway closure increases with age [34] (see also Fig. 2) as does the perfusion to “low  $V_A/Q$ ” regions [7]. Since anesthesia causes an FRC reduction by 0.4–0.5 l [35], it may be anticipated that airway closure becomes even more prominent in the anesthetized subject. There is accumulating evidence that this is indeed the case [36, 37, 38]. The reduced ventilation in the lower half of the lung just above the atelectasis that can be seen in Fig. 4 is thus reasonably explained by airway closure. It can also be seen that ventilation is smaller than perfusion, causing “low  $V_A/Q$ ” regions. These contribute to impaired oxygenation during the anesthesia.

As much as 74% of the impaired arterial oxygenation can be explained by atelectasis and airway closure taken together, according to the equation [39]:  $P_aO_2$  (mmHg)=  

$$218-22 \times \ln \text{atelectasis } (cm^2)-0.06 \times (CV-ERV) \text{ (ml)}$$

**CT scan and vertical distribution of ventilation and perfusion  
in the same lung segment**



Redrawn from:  
Tokics et al, J Appl Physiol 1996

**Fig. 4** Transverse computed tomography with atelectasis visible in the dependent parts of both lungs (*left*) and corresponding vertical distributions of ventilation and lung blood flow by isotope technique (single photon emission computed tomography, *right*) in an anesthetized subject. Note that ventilation is distributed preferentially to upper lung regions, contrary to what is normally seen in the

waking subject. Note also the decreasing ventilation in the lower part and the complete cessation of ventilation in the bottom, corresponding to the atelectatic area. Perfusion, on the other hand, increases down the lung, except for the bottom-most region where a decrease is seen (so-called “zone IV”). (Redrawn from [28])

( $r=0.86$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) where ( $CV-ERV$ ) indicates the amount of airway closure occurring above FRC,  $CV$  is closing volume, and  $ERV$  is expiratory reserve volume. A simple three-compartment lung model can thus be constructed to explain oxygenation impairment during anesthesia. The model consists of one compartment with “normal” ventilation and perfusion, one with airway closure that impedes ventilation, and one of collapsed lung with no ventilation at all. This is shown in Fig. 1 together with the subsequent impact on the  $V_A/Q$  distribution.

### Anesthesia vs. muscle paralysis

How much of the lung function impairment is produced by the anesthetic and how much by the muscle paralysis? Interestingly, the anesthetic per se causes a fall in FRC despite the maintenance of spontaneous breathing [20, 40]. The addition of muscle paralysis does not produce a further drop in FRC. Since airway closure and atelectasis depends on the lung volume the findings suggest that most of the impairment is caused by the anesthesia per se [2]. Figure 3 shows the appearance of atelectasis during spontaneous breathing with no significant increase with muscle paralysis. However, there may be a difference between spontaneous and mechanical ventilation; that is, the spontaneous breath may have a different effect on the

aeration of the lung than the mechanically delivered. The diaphragm during the active respiration moves with the dorsal, dependent part making the largest excursions whereas during passive ventilation the anterior, nondependent part is pushed away more than other regions [41]. The spontaneous breath may therefore recruit collapsed tissue in the bottom of the lung better than the mechanical breath. The CT sequence in Fig. 3 does not provide substantial support to this, and it may be that any positive effect is that recruited tissue stays open with spontaneous breathing whereas slow derecruitment occurs with mechanical breaths. This remains to be tested.

### Anesthesia vs. acute respiratory distress syndrome

Hallmarks of acute respiratory failure and its most severe form, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), are hypoxemia, reduced respiratory compliance, and atelectasis/consolidation as seen on CT of the lung [42, 43]. There are indeed qualitative similarities between anesthesia and ARDS, however with much more severe changes in ARDS. Widespread but mainly dependent lung regions collapse under their own weight, causing atelectasis. In addition, alveoli may become fluid filled. However, can it be that the treatment of ARDS per se adds to the atelectasis? This is indeed rather likely. Loss of

muscle tone, as caused by muscle relaxants, anesthetics, and sedatives, and the use of high oxygen concentration in inspired gas are the prerequisites to produce atelectasis in the lung healthy subject during anesthesia. This is common treatment in ARDS and certainly adds to the collapse and consolidation caused by the disease itself. Maintenance of muscle tone and modest use of supplemental oxygen may be a better approach to treatment than abuse of muscle depressants and oxygen. There is hardly any confirmation of beneficial effects of supranormal oxygen tension in blood, but it is frequently seen in the treatment of ARDS!

### **Prevention of atelectasis during anesthesia**

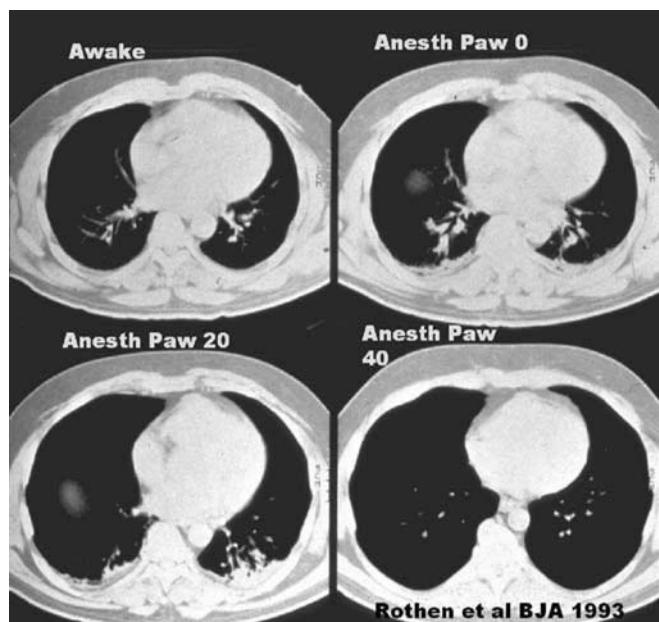
There are several interventions that can help prevent atelectasis or even reopen collapsed tissue. These are discussed below.

#### **PEEP**

The application of 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) has been tested in several studies and been shown consistently to reopen collapsed lung tissue. This is more likely an effect of increased inspiratory airway pressure than of PEEP per se [26, 44]. However, some atelectasis persists in most patients. Whether further increase in the PEEP level reopens this tissue was not analyzed in these studies. PEEP, however, appears not to be the ideal procedure. First, shunt is not reduced proportionately, and arterial oxygenation may not improve significantly. Hewlett and coworkers [45] warned as early as 1974 of the “indiscriminate use of PEEP in routine anesthesia.” The persistence of shunt may be explained by a redistribution of blood flow towards more dependent parts of the lungs when intrathoracic pressure is increased by PEEP. Under such circumstances any persisting atelectasis in the bottom of the lung receives a larger share of the pulmonary blood flow than without PEEP [46]. Also, increased intrathoracic pressure impedes venous return and decreases cardiac output. This results in a lower venous oxygen tension for a given oxygen uptake and reduces arterial oxygen tension [8]. Second, the lung recollapses rapidly after discontinuation of PEEP. Within 1 min after cessation of PEEP the collapse is as large as it was before the application of PEEP [26].

#### **Maintenance of muscle tone**

The use of an anesthetic that allows maintenance of respiratory muscle tone prevents the formation of atelectasis. Ketamine does not impair muscle tone and does not cause atelectasis. This is the only anesthetic so far tested that



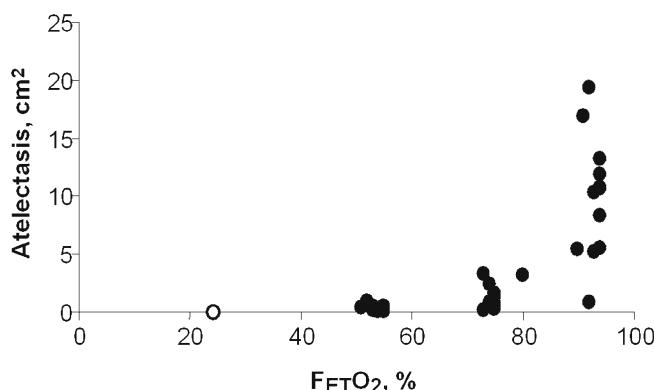
**Fig. 5** Computed tomography in a patient awake (*left upper*) during anesthesia at zero airway pressure (*Paw*), i.e., after a normal expiration (*right upper*), after an inflation to *Paw* 20 (*left lower*) and 40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (*right lower*) and a breath hold of 15 s. Note the appearance of atelectasis in the dorsal part of the lungs during anesthesia and the persistence of the atelectasis even with inflation to 20 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. Not until *Paw* was increased to 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O did some of the atelectasis reopen. A *Paw* of 40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O was required to open up all atelectasis (From [48] with permission from the publisher)

does not cause collapse. However, if muscle relaxation is required, atelectasis appears as with other anesthetics [22]. Another attempt is to restore respiratory muscle tone by pacing of the diaphragm. This was tested by applying phrenic nerve stimulation, which did reduce the atelectatic area [47]. The effect, however, was small, and this technique is certainly too complicated to be used as a routine during anesthesia and surgery.

#### **Recruitment maneuvers**

The use of a sigh maneuver, or a double tidal volume, has been advocated to reopen any collapsed lung tissue [48]. However, the atelectasis is not decreased by tidal volume or by a sigh up to an airway pressure of 20 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. Not until an airway pressure of 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O is reached does the atelectasis decrease to approximately one-half the initial size. Complete reopening of all collapsed lung tissue requires an inflation pressure of 40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O (Fig. 5) [48]. Such a large inflation corresponds to a maximum spontaneous inspiration and can thus be called a vital capacity maneuver.

Because the vital capacity maneuver may result in adverse cardiovascular events, the dynamics in resolving atelectasis during such a procedure was analyzed [49]. It



**Fig. 6** Atelectasis near the diaphragm in individual patients (filled circles) after induction of anesthesia and a period of apnea in relation to their endtidal O<sub>2</sub> concentration ( $F_{ET}O_2$ ) just before the period of apnea. The results are compared with data (open circle) [51] in which subjects were ventilated with 30% oxygen in nitrogen (From [52] with permission from the publisher)

was found that in adults with healthy lungs inflation of the lungs to +40 cmH<sub>2</sub>O maintained for no more than 7–8 s may reexpand all previously collapsed lung tissue.

#### Minimizing gas resorption

Ventilation of the lungs with pure oxygen after a vital capacity maneuver that had reopened previously collapsed lung tissue has been shown to result in a rapid reappearance of the atelectasis [50]. If, on the other hand, 40% O<sub>2</sub> in nitrogen is used for ventilation of the lungs, atelectasis reappears slowly, and 40 min after the vital capacity maneuver only 20% of the initial atelectasis has reappeared. Thus ventilation during anesthesia should be carried out with a moderate FIO<sub>2</sub>, for example., 0.3–0.4, and be increased only if arterial oxygenation is compromised.

The striking effects of oxygen during anesthesia raised the question of whether the preoxygenation during induction of anesthesia affects atelectasis formation. The breathing of 100% O<sub>2</sub> for only a few minutes before and during the commencement of anesthesia increases the safety margin in the event of a difficult intubation of the airway with prolonged apnea. However, there proves to be a prize for this. Avoidance of the preoxygenation procedure (ventilation with 30% O<sub>2</sub>) eliminates atelectasis formation during the induction and subsequent anesthesia [51]. In a recent study, 12 patients breathed 100% O<sub>2</sub> during the induction of anesthesia, 12 80% O<sub>2</sub>, and 12 60% O<sub>2</sub> [52]. Atelectasis appeared in all patients on 100% O<sub>2</sub> and was much less in the 80% O<sub>2</sub> group and almost absent in the 60% O<sub>2</sub> group (Fig. 6).

Preliminary data from our own experiments show that with induction of anesthesia during 100% preoxygenation atelectasis occurs within 7 min and continues to increase in extent for at least another 7 min. Very little was seen after 4 min, suggesting that there is a narrow time window after the induction and the intubation of the airway when no collapse yet has occurred, and that might be prevented by a deep breath with more modest oxygen concentration, the make-up gas being nitrogen. That rather subtle changes in the preoxygenation procedure and anesthesia regime can prevent substantial atelectasis formation with potential decrease in postoperative lung complications is likely but requires further study.

In summary, rapid collapse of alveoli on induction of anesthesia and more widespread closure of airways seem to explain oxygenation impairment during anesthesia. They may also contribute to postoperative pulmonary infection. Causative mechanisms seem to be a loss of respiratory muscle tone and gas resorption. Avoiding high inspired oxygen fractions during both induction and maintenance of anesthesia prevents or reduces atelectasis, while intermittent “vital capacity” maneuvers recruit atelectatic lung regions.

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## Diaphragmatic fatigue during sepsis and septic shock

mal models of sepsis, where Gram-negative bacteria have mainly been used as the infectious agent.

The diaphragm is the primary muscle of respiration, and severe dysfunction of the diaphragm, consisting of decreased maximal force production and increased susceptibility to fatigue, has been documented in animal models of sepsis. A large number of studies have examined the effects of endotoxemia and other sepsis models on diaphragm contractility in spontaneously breathing animals.

### Introduction

In the United States sepsis annually affects 700,000 people and accounts for about 210,000 deaths. Respiratory failure has long been known to be a frequent occurrence of this pathological condition and to represent a major contributor to the high associated mortality [1]. This contribution discusses of the effects of sepsis and septic shock on respiratory muscle function and focuses on some of the possible mechanisms involved in the genesis of these effects.

For nearly a century sepsis has been defined as the systemic host response to infection. A consensus definition was formulated a decade ago [2], and the list of symptoms has recently been updated [3]. Sepsis is now defined as infection with evidence of systemic inflammation, with at least two of the following: increased or decreased temperature or leukocyte count, tachycardia, and rapid breathing. In this context septic shock is defined as a state of acute circulatory failure characterized by persistent arterial hypotension unexplained by other causes [3]. Interestingly, the spectrum of responsible micro-organisms seems to have shifted from Gram-negative bacteria in the late 1970s to Gram-positive ones at present [4]. This is an important fact to point out since studies evaluating the effects of sepsis and septic shock on respiratory muscle function have been performed in ani-

### Respiratory muscle dysfunction during sepsis

Twenty years ago Hussain and associates [5] first demonstrated in spontaneously breathing dogs that endotoxic shock resulted in respiratory muscle fatigue, which in turn was the main factor responsible for respiratory failure and death in this experimental model of septic shock (*Escherichia coli* administration). Occurrence of respiratory muscle dysfunction in endotoxic shock has also been reported by our laboratory in mechanically ventilated rats [6]. In this study we observed decreased diaphragmatic strength restricted to the transdiaphragmatic pressure (Pdi) generated at high frequencies of phrenic nerve stimulation (50 and 100 Hz) while both twitch and low frequency Pdi and muscle relaxation rate remained unchanged. Endurance capacity of the diaphragm was curtailed in endotoxicemic animals. Contractile dysfunction was associated with a decreased diaphragmatic resting membrane potential. This phenomenon, which has been reported in critically ill patients with various diseases [7] and in septic animal models [8], could impair action potential generation resulting in failure of neuromuscular transmission due to a postsynaptic membrane depolarization and an impaired propagation of electrical excitation along diaphragmatic fibers.

A major common point between the two studies cited above is that blood pressure was significantly reduced in

septic animals. It is well known that blood pressure is a major determinant of muscle metabolic substrate delivery and contractile function. The results of Hussain and coworkers [5] are very similar to those reported by Aubier and coworkers [9] in nonseptic hypotensive spontaneously breathing dogs. The similarity in findings raises the question of the role of hypotension in the pathophysiology of the immediate effects of sepsis on respiratory muscle function, which could be of particular importance in the context of septic shock.

Murphy and associates [10] evaluated the role of Gram-positive bacterial products in muscle dysfunction in 4-week-old piglets. These authors investigated in spontaneously breathing animals the effects on diaphragmatic strength of a continuous infusion of group B streptococcus at a level that caused a decrease in cardiac output, but which avoided hypotension. Diaphragmatic strength was evaluated by measuring Pdi generated during bilateral phrenic stimulation. The main result of this study was that Pdi remained unchanged in septic animals over a 4-h period. However, another study from the same laboratory [10] showed that increasing the dose of streptococcus while avoiding significant hypotension resulted in a transitory but significant decrease in diaphragmatic strength. Hurtado and coworkers [11] investigated the role of hypotension in peripheral muscle dysfunction during sepsis. These authors evaluated the effects of a similar level of septic and nonseptic hypotension on peripheral muscle metabolism and strength generation in rabbits. Blood pressure decreased by approx. 22% of baseline values in both groups of animals. This study showed that by the end of the experiment (180 min after the onset of hypotension) hind-limb force was significantly reduced in septic animals for all the frequencies of stimulation. However, a similar reduction was observed in nonseptic animals. Taken together, these studies suggest that both hypotension and bacterial products make individual contributions to the genesis of the immediate deleterious effects of sepsis on respiratory muscle function. It is unclear whether septic hypotension has none, additive, or synergic effects (in terms of diaphragm dysfunction) with respect to nonseptic hypotension. To our knowledge, no data are available in the literature examining at the same time both septic and nonseptic hypotension. One can imagine that an animal model supporting both septic and nonseptic hypotension would be extremely difficult to manage.

Once the first reports on the immediate effects of sepsis on respiratory muscle function were published, investigators began to be interested also by the consequences of septic processes lasting several days. Using an *in vivo* rat model we evaluated the modifications in diaphragmatic function 3 days after *Streptococcus pneumoniae* injection [12] and 2 days after inoculation of *E. coli* endotoxin [13]. Both inoculations were performed subcutaneously, and both models of sepsis were nonlethal,

with no change in blood pressure, serum electrolytes and acid-base status. The results of these studies were similar: 2 or 3 days of experimental sepsis in rats impaired diaphragmatic function without affecting muscle mass or histology. Contractile force in response to phrenic stimulation was reduced without a concomitant decrease in the electrical activity of the muscle. Muscle relaxation rate was prolonged, and the diaphragms of septic animals fatigued rapidly in response to a stimulation regimen that was without effect on the diaphragms of control animals.

Similar results were reported by Shindoh and coworkers [14] in *E. coli* endotoxin-inoculated hamsters. More recently Krause and coworkers [15] and Matczuzak and collaborators [16] showed a decreased diaphragmatic force in experimental models of pancreatitis, suggesting that patients suffering from such disease may be susceptible to respiratory muscle failure. Finally, Drew and associates [17] examined the effects of a chronic infection lasting several weeks, visceral leishmaniasis, on the function of the diaphragm and the peripheral muscles soleus and plantaris. Muscular function was assessed *in vitro*. Infected animals (intracardiac inoculation of *Leishmania donovani* amastigotes) were maintained for 7–12 weeks until advanced disease characterized by anorexia, weight loss, and weakness was evident. Body weight and the mass of the diaphragm, soleus, and plantaris were reduced in septic animals. Absolute contractile force of the diaphragm and soleus muscles was moderately reduced, and only to the extent that muscle mass was decreased. Force normalized to muscle mass or cross-sectional area was not impaired. In contrast, the force of the plantaris, a fast twitch muscle, was severely reduced even after correcting for loss of muscle mass. The effects of leishmaniasis on the diaphragm and soleus muscles did not differ from those of semistarvation with equivalent weight loss, but these models of sepsis produced much greater loss in plantaris force than occurred with semistarvation.

To summarize, the last 20 years have brought multiple evidence and some explanation regarding the occurrence of severe dysfunction of the diaphragm in animal models of sepsis, dysfunction consisting in decreased maximal force production, and an increased susceptibility to fatigue.

### **Mechanisms of respiratory muscle dysfunction during sepsis**

The underlying mechanisms of respiratory muscle dysfunction occurring during the early phase and after several days of sepsis are certainly different. They encompass energetic and metabolic components as well as the implication of mediators such as prostaglandins, cytokines, reactive oxygen species (ROS), and nitric oxide [18].

## Energetics

From a general point of view respiratory muscle dysfunction is thought to occur when blood supply of energetic substrates to the muscle is not sufficient to meet the muscle's metabolic needs [19]. The efficiency of energy minus uptake by these muscles depends mainly upon the total blood flow that reaches them, the conditions of perfusion of the microvascular network, and the ability of muscle cells to utilize metabolic substrates. All of these processes can be altered by the septic condition.

The septic state is characterized by generalized blood flow redistribution among the different organs including the respiratory muscles. However, this phenomenon is modulated by the degree of contractile activity. Either immediately or lately after the beginning of the septic process, blood flow decreases if the diaphragm is at rest [5] and increases if it contracts [20]. The increase in respiratory muscles blood flow during septic shock can reach dramatic levels, resulting in reduced blood flow to the brain, gastrointestinal tract, and other skeletal muscles [5]. It is predictable that in this state the function of the vital organs other than the respiratory muscles is compromised. However, in spite of this finding the values for diaphragmatic blood flow observed during septic shock are much lower than the maximum reported in normotensive conditions [5]. Therefore, although diaphragmatic blood flow is significantly increased during sepsis, a septic-induced limitation to the maximal blood flow is operational. This limitation can occur at the microcirculatory level. Using an *in vivo* experimental model in rats we have shown that the number of perfused-diaphragmatic capillaries decreases significantly after *E. coli* endotoxin inoculation [21]. In addition to the microcirculatory limitation in metabolic substrates delivery to the respiratory muscles, the ability of muscle cells to utilize metabolic substrates is compromised in sepsis. *E. coli* endotoxin inoculation in rats induces an impairment in diaphragmatic mitochondrial respiration associated with an increased production of hydrogen peroxide [22, 23], secondary to induction of the inducible isoform of nitric oxide synthase (NOS II) in the muscle (see below).

For many years it has been recognized that the septic process is the result of extensive triggering of the body defense mechanisms by the invading micro-organisms and their products. Studies performed in the past 15 years have shown that respiratory muscle dysfunction during sepsis can be attributed to the actions of endogenously produced mediators, such as prostaglandins, cytokines, ROS, and NO.

## Mediators

Several studies indicate that prostaglandins play a role in the development of peripheral skeletal muscle dysfunc-

tion during sepsis [24]. Elevated prostaglandin E<sub>2</sub> levels have been found in peripheral muscles of septic animals [25, 26], and pharmacological inhibition of prostaglandins synthesis has been shown to protect septic animals from peripheral skeletal muscle impairment [24]. In a similar line, we have found that the cyclooxygenase inhibitor indomethacin prevents the reduction in diaphragmatic strength found in *E. coli* endotoxemic animals [13]. In addition, this agent prevents peripheral muscles atrophy. Similar results have been reported by Murphy and coworkers [27] in septic piglets. The latter study found that systemic administration of thromboxane A<sub>2</sub> mimics the reduction in diaphragmatic strength observed in septic animals.

Among cytokines tumor necrosis factor (TNF)  $\alpha$  has received substantial attention in the context of the septic process. *In vitro* studies show a dose-dependent decrease in diaphragmatic strength elicited by incubation of muscular fibers with murine or human TNF- $\alpha$  [28], with a synergistic effect of interleukin-1 $\beta$  on diaphragmatic contractility [29]. Furthermore, *in vivo* TNF- $\alpha$  induced a significant decrease in diaphragmatic force in dogs beginning 4 h after administration [30]. Inoculation of rats with *E. coli* endotoxin induced TNF- $\alpha$  mRNA expression in the diaphragm along with a decreased force [31], and pretreatment of the animals with an anti-murine TNF- $\alpha$  antibody prevented the deterioration in diaphragmatic contractile properties [31]. Together these findings suggest that TNF- $\alpha$  induces a decrease in diaphragmatic force generation. Different mechanisms may explain the effects of TNF- $\alpha$  on diaphragmatic contractility. Wilcox and coworkers [32] showed a role of prostaglandins and Reid and associated [33] demonstrated that TNF- $\alpha$  decreases force by blunting the response of muscle myofilaments to calcium activation. Whether these effects are mediated directly by TNF- $\alpha$  or indirectly by the induction of molecules such as ROS or NO (see below) warrants further investigation.

## Reactive oxygen species

ROS are produced by all aerobic organisms as a consequence of oxygen consumption and cell respiration. They play a role of intracellular mediators at physiological concentrations, but in stress situations increasing production of ROS can lead to cellular injury. During sepsis the rate of ROS produced by respiratory muscles increases, releasing a large amount of superoxide anion, hydroxyl radical, and hydrogen peroxide [34]. This enhanced ROS production derives from different cellular compartments: one part of these ROS depends on mitochondrial chain respiration impairment following hemodynamic failure [35] while another part comes from sepsis-activated constitutive skeletal muscle NAD(P)H oxidase [36]. The participation of ROS in septic dia-

phragmatic failure has been clearly demonstrated in experimental models by the protective effect of antioxidant treatments, such as *N*-acetylcysteine [13], catalase, and superoxide dismutase [14]. Among the different ROS superoxide anion and hydroxyl radical are the two species that play the central role in reducing fibers calcium sensitivity and altering contractile protein capacity [37]. ROS reduce skeletal muscle force-generating capacity by inhibiting mitochondrial oxygen consumption, especially during ADP-stimulated (state 3) diaphragm mitochondrial oxygen utilization [23]. In septic patients an association has been found between antioxidant depletion, mitochondrial dysfunction and organ failure and outcome [38], underlying the importance of oxidative stress in generating energetic failure. Oxidants can structurally alter other, different components of excitation-contraction coupling system: T-tubules, sarcoplasmic reticulum calcium ATPase, and head of myosin oxidation (leading to inhibition of actin-myosin binding). Protein oxidation in skeletal muscle comes early during sepsis and is significantly correlated to the decline in mitochondrial respiration. Moreover, oxidized proteins are more sensitive to degradation. Proteolysis takes part to the development of muscular weakness observed in sepsis. Finally, myoglobin oxidation decreases oxygen storage capacity of the muscle.

#### Nitric oxide and its metabolites

NO is a secondary messenger molecule which participates in numerous biological processes, including vasodilatation, neurotransmission, and bronchodilatation. NO is synthesized by a group of enzymes referred to as NOS which are responsible of the conversion of L-arginine to L-citrulline and NO in presence of oxygen. Three NOS isoforms (I–III) have been identified so far, and they all are expressed in respiratory muscles, particularly in diaphragm [39, 40, 41]. In animal models of sepsis it has been extensively demonstrated that NOS II expression is induced in the diaphragm, both at mRNA and protein levels, with a resultant increase in NO production [41, 42, 43]. Several lines of evidence suggest that impaired diaphragmatic contractility is a result of NO overproduction during sepsis. Boczkowski et al. [41] were the first to propose a link between in vivo induction of diaphragmatic NOS II and its involvement in the genesis of diaphragmatic contractile dysfunction after *E. coli* endotoxin inoculation in rats. First, this study showed that the time course of NOS II induction in diaphragmatic myocytes and that of the decrease in diaphragmatic force are similar, and, second, that inhibition of NO synthesis by either *N*<sup>ω</sup>-monomethyl-L-arginine (L-NMMA), an inhibitor of NOS activity, or dexamethasone, an inhibitor of NOS II induction, significantly improves the decrease in diaphragmatic force observed in endotoxemic animals.

Similar results have been reported by El-Dwairi et al. [44] using *S*-methylisothiourea as NOS activity inhibitor. In an attempt to define the exact role of the different NOS isoforms in lipopolysaccharide (LPS) induced diaphragmatic contractile injury, two studies by Comtois and collaborators [45, 46] investigated their role in genetically engineered mice, knockouts (KO) for either NOS II or NOS I. Taken together, the findings of these studies suggest that both NOS I and NOS II isoforms play protective roles in attenuating LPS-induced reduction in diaphragmatic contractile function, despite leading, respectively, to a decreased and an increased NO synthesis. Interestingly, another study in NOS II KO mice [47], showed that LPS injection induces less tyrosine nitration than in wild-type mice, although deficiency for NOS I or NOS III does not affect this protein modification. This points out the great importance of the environment in which NO is synthesized. However, the mechanism(s) by which NO participates in the alteration of diaphragmatic contractile function remain(s) to be determined.

NO by itself has a deleterious effect on mitochondrial respiration, with the inhibition of several enzymes such as aconitase and cytochrome oxidase [48, 49]. This effect of NO may contribute to poor oxygen extraction observed in sepsis and thus participate in altered muscular function. Moreover, NO can produce its deleterious effects by its reaction with superoxide anion to form peroxynitrite anion ( $\text{ONOO}^-$ ), a very strong oxidizing agent [50], which targets various molecules such as thiols, lipids, and proteins containing aromatic amino acids, and irreversibly inhibits several mitochondrial enzymes such as aconitase, NADH and succinate dehydrogenases, and superoxide dismutase [51, 52, 53]. Several authors have described peroxynitrite formation in the diaphragm of endotoxemic animals [41, 44, 47], mainly in the mitochondrial and membrane fractions of LPS-treated rats diaphragm [47], a treatment with L-NMMA leading to a diminished nitration of diaphragmatic mitochondrial proteins [22]. Finally, studies on the role of peroxynitrite on diaphragmatic contractile function show that in vitro exposure of muscular samples to peroxynitrite itself or peroxynitrite-generating agents leads to a decreased force generation [54]. It must be pointed out, however, that exogenously generated peroxynitrite, considering its short half-life at physiological pH [55], may not react in the same way as endogenously produced peroxynitrite. The exact relationship between peroxynitrite generation and contractile function impairment is not entirely clear, but one possible explanation lies in the oxidizing and nitrating properties of peroxynitrite which can lead to the alteration of proteins involved in the contractile process, such as actin [56] and the sarcoplasmic reticulum  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -ATPase [57].

One mediator of interest could be cGMP, as it is widely known that NO activates the soluble guanylyl cyclase, leading to cyclic GMP synthesis [58]. Kobzik et al. [40] demonstrated that agents able to increase intra-

cellular cGMP content, such as 8-bromo cGMP, reverse the protective effect of NOS inhibitors on muscular force. However, in another study [41], activation of guanylyl cyclase observed in diaphragmatic muscle after LPS inoculation showed a biphasic time course; early activation appeared to be due to NO synthesized by NOS II, while late activation was independent of NO. Thus the exact role of cGMP in mediating the effects of NO in sepsis-induced diaphragmatic contractile dysfunction still remains to be elucidated. Finally, the pharmacological approach used by several authors brings some insights to better understand the exact role that NO could play in the alteration of respiratory muscle function. Inhibition of NOS activity, by administration of the NOS inhibitor *N*<sup>ω</sup>-nitro-L-arginine methylester leads to a protection against the reduction in myofiber calcium sensitivity observed in endotoxemic rats [37]. Moreover, administration of L-NMMA, another NOS inhibitor, significantly reduces LPS-induced diaphragm sarcolemmal injury and alters resting membrane potential in rats [43]. This could have a direct effect on muscular function. It is important to mention in this context a study by Ebihara and coworkers [59] which determined the impact of mechanical ventilation on rat diaphragm sarcolemmal injury, NOS II expression, and oxidative stress during endotoxemia. These authors demonstrated that starting ventilation at the time of infusing endotoxin into rats partially prevents the impaired diaphragmatic contractility due to sepsis. Mechanical ventilation also prevented the injury to the sarcolemma of diaphragmatic cells [59], but surprisingly did not reduce the increase in expression of NOS II. This should not lead us to the conclusion that nitric oxide and oxidative stress are less important than in the context of muscle injury caused by sepsis. Indeed, in the same study [59], using an in vitro system to independently modulate oxidative and mechanical stresses, the authors demonstrated that these two factors act in a synergistic fashion to favor the occurrence of sarcolemmal injury.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that sepsis impairs the function of respiratory muscles. This impairment is observed soon after the onset of the septic process and may be still present after several weeks, depending on the duration of the infectious aggression. The precocious dysfunction is strongly related to the hypotension that can be present in this condition. In contrast, the later effects (days to weeks) appear to be independent of hemodynamic alterations and are connected to pathophysiological processes that need some time (days to weeks) to develop. From an integrated point of view it is possible to postulate that sepsis impairs respiratory muscle function by acting at two levels. The first is by disturbances at different steps of the chain of muscular energy supply: blood flow and metabolic substrate extraction and utilization. The second is a direct impairment of the contractile process. These effects of sepsis are probably the result of the action of septic mediators. The result is a complex series of effects on the respiratory muscles that have the potential for profound clinical consequences. Despite the recent advances in the field much remains to be learned, and several questions are still unresolved. Answers to these questions will allow the clinicians to better manage respiratory failure in septic patients and particularly the mechanical ventilation procedure. Recommendations for the use of mechanical ventilation during sepsis will depend substantially on the clinical status of the patient. Putting the respiratory muscles at rest when they are fatigued has been shown to be beneficial at least during the weaning process of mechanical ventilation. However, resting the respiratory muscles by mechanical ventilation could also be deleterious. The decision as to mechanical ventilation during sepsis should therefore be based on the respiratory as well as circulating parameters, both leading to respiratory failure.

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Jean-Roger Le Gall

## The use of severity scores in the intensive care unit

### Background

Around 1980 several intensivists decided to score the severity of ICU patients in order to compare the populations and evaluate the results. The outcome of intensive care depends on several factors present on the first day in the ICU and on the patient's course under ICU therapy. The severity scores comprise usually two parts: the score itself and a probability model. The score itself is a number (the highest number, the highest severity). The probability model is an equation giving the probability of hospital death of the patients. This seminal comprise two parts: the classification of the scores and their practical use.

### Classification of the severity scores

Many severity scores have been published but only a few are used. Most scores are calculated from data collected on the first ICU day; these include the Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation (APACHE), Simplified Acute Physiology Score (SAPS), and Mortality Prediction Model (MPM). Others are repetitive and collect data every day throughout the ICU stay or for the first 3 days; these include the Organ System Failure (OSF), Organ Dysfunction and Infection System (ODIN), Sequential Organ Failure Assessment (SOFA), Multiple Organs

Dysfunction Score (MODS), Logistic Organ Dysfunction (LOD) model, and Three-Day Recalibrating ICU Outcomes (TRIOS).

#### First-day ICU severity scores

##### *Subjective scores*

These scores are established by a panel of experts who choose the variables and assign a weight to each variable based on their personal opinion. For each variable a range of normality is defined, with a score of 0 within this range. The more abnormal the result, the higher the weight that is given, from 0 to 4 points. The total number of points constitutes the score. The most commonly used scoring system is APACHE II [1]. This includes variables such as age, preexisting diseases, and 12 acute physiological variables. This yields a probability of hospital death depending on the main diagnosis.

##### *Objective scores*

Development of a multipurpose probability model requires that a large database be compiled using data from many ICUs. Variables collected can generally be classified into four groups: age, comorbidities, physiological abnormalities, and acute diagnoses. Some systems have introduced variables designed to decrease the lead-time bias. The principal outcome for each of the systems is vital status at hospital discharge. Other outcome measures (e.g., vital status 28 days after hospital discharge or quality, life among long-term survivors) can also be modeled. Logistic regression modeling techniques, smoothing methods, and clinical judgment are used to select variables, determine ranges, and assign weights. All of the systems result in a logistic regression model that estimates the risk of death. In chronological order of

publication the main objective scores are APACHE III [2], the SAPS II [3], and the MPM II [4].

**APACHE III.** This score uses largely the same variables as APACHE II but a different way in which to collect the neurological data, no longer using the Glasgow Coma Score. It adds particularly two important variables: the patient's origin and the lead-time bias. The acute diagnosis is taken into account; one diagnosis must be preferred.

**SAPS II and the expanded SAPS II.** The same technique was used to construct SAPS II. The database, however, was established from European and North American ICUs, and the acute diagnosis were not included. The authors considered it too difficult to select a single diagnosis for an ICU patient. As for other scoring systems the discrimination and particularly the calibration of the SAPS II model does not fit when applied to a new population. The model can be adapted to a country or a specific population by a customization process or by expansion of the model through the addition of new variables. For example, a revision of SAPS II has been proposed by Aergerter et al. [5]. Retrospective analysis of 33,471 prospectively collected multicenter data was performed in 32 ICUs located in the Paris area. They developed two logistic regression models. The second one reevaluated items of SAPS II and integration of the preadmission location and chronic comorbidity. Another proposal was recently made by Le Gall et al. [6]. From a database of 77,490 admissions in 106 French ICUs they added six admission variables to SAPS II: age, sex, length of the ICU hospital stay, patient location before ICU, clinical category, and whether drug overdose was present. The statistical qualities of the expanded SAPS II are much better than those of the original and even the customized SAPS II. The original SAPS II mortality prediction model is outdated and needs to be adapted to current ICU populations. The original SAPS II may be used to score the ICU patients' severity. But to calculate the standardized mortality ratio or the ICU performance measure it is now necessary to use the expanded SAPS II Adding simple data, routinely collected, to the original SAPS II led to better calibration, discrimination, and uniformity-of-fit of the model. The statistical qualities of the expanded SAPS II are much better than those of the original and the customized SAPS II. Above all, the expanded SAPS II is easy to obtain from the existing databases. It is now the simplest system for precisely measuring ICU performance and comparing performance over years.

**MPM II.** In the case of the MPM II one has not a score but a model giving directly the probability of hospital death. This uses chronic health status, acute diagnosis, a few physiological variables, and some other variables including mechanical ventilation. The database is the same

as that for the SAPS II. Four models have been proposed: MPM II at admission and at 24, 48, and 78 h.

**SAPS 3.** A worldwide database of 19,577 patients was used to develop SAPS III. It comprises three parts: chronic variables, acute variables including the sepsis and its characteristics, and physiology. The calculated probability of ICU and hospital death emerges by adding diagnoses to the model. Evaluation of ICU performance is adapted to each ICU according to its case-mix [7, 8].

## Repetitive scores

### Subjective scores

**OSF.** Data on five organ failures are included in the OSF system [9]. The main prognostic factors are the number and duration of these failures. Mortality is close to 100% when three organs failures persist for 5 days or longer.

**ODIN.** Fagon et al. [10] proposed the ODIN system in 1993. This includes data on six organ failures plus one infection and differentiates prognosis according to the type of failures.

**SOFA.** Published in 1998 by Vincent et al. [11], the SOFA subjective score was evaluated on 1,449 patients. Data on six failures are scored on a scale of 0–4. One failure plus a respiratory failure indicate the lowest mortality; all the other combinations yield a mortality between 65% and 74%. Subsequent analyses have considered the maximal score plus the maximal change and have shown that the latter has a lower prognostic value than the former.

### Objective scores

**MODS.** In 1995 Marshall et al. [12] examined the definitional criteria of organ failures proposed in the literature and tested these criteria in a population of 692 patients. The result of their work, the MODS, comprises a score based on six failures each scored from 0 to 4. This considers the time of occurrence of each failure; respiratory failure was found to be the first ( $1.8 \pm 4.7$  days) and hepatic failure the last ( $4.7 \pm 5.5$  days). They showed that mortality depends non only on the admission score but also on course.

**LOD model.** This model based on the LOD is the only one based on logistic regression. From a European North American database 12 variables were tested and 6 organ failures defined [13]. The originality of the model is to give to each dysfunction a weight of 0–5 points. Severe neurological, cardiovascular, and renal failures are scored

5, severe respiratory failure 3, and severe hepatic failure 1. The model has been tested over time. The difference between the LOD scores on day 3 and day 1 is highly predictive of the hospital outcome.

**TRIOS.** A composite score using daily SAPS II and LOD score for predicting hospital hospitality in ICU patients hospitalized for more 72 h was proposed by Timsit et al. [14] in 2001. This TRIOS composite score has excellent statistical qualities and may be used for research purposes.

## Model validation

Model performance must be demonstrated in a sample of patients independent of that used to develop the models. Validation samples have been assembled either by collecting data on a new cohort of patients or by randomly splitting an available database into two portions—one used to develop the model and the other to validate it [15].

### Model calibration

Calibration evaluates the degree of correspondence between the estimated probabilities of mortality produced by a model and the actual mortality experienced by patients. Calibration can be statistically evaluated using formal goodness-of-fit tests [16]. What information does the assessment of calibration provide? If a model estimates that a set of patients have a probability of hospital mortality of 0.38, this means that among 100 such patients 38 would be expected to die and 62 to live. When the observed number of deaths is close to the number predicted by the model, it is considered to be well calibrated.

To test calibration formally patients are rank-ordered according to their probability of mortality and grouped into range-defined strata. Typically ten such strata are formed, each containing approximately the same number of patients (called “risk deciles”). To obtain the predicted number of deaths in a stratum, the probabilities of mortality for all patients in that stratum are summed. Formal goodness-of-fit testing compares the observed with the predicted number of deaths and the observed with the predicted number of survivors in each stratum of patients. The resulting value can be used to determine whether the combined discrepancy between observed and predicted outcome across all strata is within sampling variability. If differences are large, the model does not correctly reflect the outcome in that cohort of patients.

### Model discrimination

Discrimination uses the area under the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve to evaluate the ability of a

model to distinguish patients who die from patients who live, based on the estimated probabilities of mortality. To construct the ROC curve [17] a sequence of probability cutoff points is specified, and a  $2 \times 2$  classification table of predicted and observed outcome is constructed for each cutoff. For example, if the cutoff is set at 0.35, any patient whose probability of mortality is 0.35 or higher would be predicted to die, whereas any patient whose probability is less than 0.35 would be predicted to live. Observed mortality is noted for each patient and from the resulting  $2 \times 2$  table the false-positive and true-positive rates are determined. All these pairs of rates for the sequence of cutoff points are then plotted, resulting in the visual presentation of the ROC curve. The higher the true-positive rate is relative to the false-positive rate, the greater is the area under the ROC curve.

Interpretation of the area under the ROC curve is quite simple. If the entire sample were divided into patients who lived and patients who died, and each patient who lived were paired with each patient who died, there would be  $n_1 \times n_0$  such pairs (where  $n_1$  is the number of patients who lived and  $n_0$  is the number who died). The area under the ROC curve is the proportion of the total number of pairs in which the model resulted in a higher probability for the patient who died than the patient who lived. Clearly, if the value is in the neighborhood of 0.50, the model performs no better than the flip of a coin. Developers of models are usually not satisfied unless the ROC area of a model exceeds 0.70.

### Comparison of the models

#### *Comparison provided by the developers*

The latest generation of models (APACHE III, SAPS II, MPM II) have been evaluated by the developers. Ideally information would be available on calibration and discrimination in both the developmental and the validation samples. Except for the physiology component of APACHE III the system was developed using the entire sample, and therefore no independent validation sample results are reported in the publication which presents the system. Reported discrimination power of all three systems was excellent. In the total sample the area under the ROC curve was 0.90 for APACHE III, 0.88 for SAPS II, and 0.84, 0.84, 0.81, and 0.79 for  $MPM_0$ ,  $MPM_{24}$ ,  $MPM_{48}$ , and  $MPM_{72}$ , respectively, in the developmental samples. For SAPS II the area under the ROC curve was 0.86 in the validation sample and 0.82, 0.84, 0.80, and 0.75 in the validation samples for the four models of the MPM II. Information for evaluating the goodness-of-fit of APACHE III has been not reported. The calibration of the models in the SAPS II and MPM II systems indicated that all of the models fit the data well, as reflected by the close correspondence between the observed and predicted out-

comes across the entire range of probabilities. Calibration was excellent in the developmental samples for all of the SAPS II and MPM II models, and close correspondence between observed and predicted numbers of deaths was noted in the independent validation sample as well.

### *The qualities of models over time*

The case-mix does not remain the same as the therapies evolve over time, and the selection of patients admitted to ICUs may differ over time, and therefore published scoring systems become obsolete. Usually the ROC curves remain good, but the validation, when the scores are applied to other populations, is poor. Depending on the score it may be useful to customize it to the respective population. To compare patient groups in a clinical study it is not necessary to change the score used. For instance the SAPS II continues to be used in many scientific publications. To evaluate the performance of an ICU it is better to customize the score. There are two ways in which to do this: change the probability equation or the weight of each variable [18], or add new variables, which requires a further collection of data.

### **Practical use of the scores**

Scoring systems have been proposed in use for individual patient prediction to evaluate the performance of ICUs and for therapeutic trials. In general, proposed uses for scores or probabilities can be considered at both the individual patient level and the aggregate level. That is, one may use a score to make a statement about groups of patients. Serious consequences may arise depending on the action that one takes in response to such a statement, and therefore a conservative approach to the application of scores to individuals is necessary. After all the careful research that has produced the various severity scoring systems, the uses to which they can be appropriately be put are still not universally agreed [19]

### Prediction for individuals patients

The systems can be used either to determine objective risk of death or in a clinical assessment. Meyer et al. [20] showed that among the patients who were predicted by both methods to die, more than 40% of actually survived. They concluded that no method is reliable for predicting the mortality of surgical ICU patients. This illustrates the confusion that exists between interpreting an estimated probability of mortality and predicting whether a given patient will live or die. A good severity system provides an accurate estimate of the number of patients predicted to die among a group of similar patients; however, it does

not provide a prediction of which particular patients will in fact die. Using a well-calibrated severity model, we can reasonably expect that approx. 75% of patients with a probability of mortality of 0.75 will die, but we cannot know in advance which of those patients will be among the 25% who will live. Furthermore, these 25% will not have falsified the odds but will have confirmed the validity of the probabilities.

The possibility that clinical decisions can be augmented by having an objective (although not always more accurate) assessment of a patient's severity of illness is appealing. Physicians are interested in severity systems for individual patients as an adjunct to their informed but subjective opinion. Using these tools as part of the decision-making process is reasonable and prudent. Using these tools to dictate individual patient decisions is not appropriate. Decisions will and should remain the responsibility of the individual physician and should be based on a number of criteria, one of which is severity as estimated by a well calibrated scoring system.

### Evaluation of ICU performance

Using the APACHE II system Knaus et al. [21] calculated the probabilities of hospital mortality in a sample of 16,622 consecutive patients from 42 ICUs and compared this to the actual outcome. They observed that the ratio of observed to predicted number of deaths varied from 0.67 to 1.21 across ICUs. That is, in some ICUs the observed mortality was lower than predicted by the models, and in some it was higher. Similarly, using the SAPS II system Le Gall et al. [22] compared the probabilities of hospital mortality and actual outcome in ICUs in several countries. They found that the ratio varied across countries from 0.74 to 1.31, with some countries having a lower number of deaths than predicted and some a higher number.

One cannot conclude from these findings, however that clinical performance in different ICUs or different countries is necessarily below par when the observed mortality is higher than predicted, or that it is necessarily above par when the observed mortality is lower than predicted. To use these ratios effectively one must know the extent to which they are affected by factors others than clinical performance. These ratios are most effectively interpreted as indicators that one should look more deeply into the situation in the various ICUs to identify factors associated with the observed mortality differential. These probabilities by themselves do not effectively control for all of the differences that may have an impact on outcome. They cannot control for differences in patient mix or for disparities in available technical and therapeutic resources. Neither can they control for administrative differences or the level or organization of support staffing (e.g., beds per nurse). Only after taking such factors into consideration can meaningful evaluations and comparisons be made.

## Therapeutic trials

As a specific case in point, this discussion is oriented toward therapeutic trials for sepsis, but the issues involved can be applied to clinical trials involving any disease or condition and any proposed new therapy. While some authors [23] have stressed the importance of preexisting comorbidity for prognosis of septicemia in critically ill patients, others [24] have shown by multivariate analysis that using the initial score, cause (urosepsis or other), and treatment location prior to ICU admission provides the greatest degree of discrimination (ROC=0.82) of patients by risk of hospital death.

A complex model has been published for sepsis derived from a large database using physiology, primary disease, previous intensive care, age, clinical history of cirrhosis, and other variables [25]. This is proposed for use in clinical trials in which sepsis is the sole disorder of interest. However, the database from which the model was developed defined disease spectrum and inclusion criteria in a manner that may differ from that specified for a proposed trial of a new therapy for sepsis. In general it is unlikely that the precise inclusion or exclusion criteria for a specific trial were used in compiling the original database from which a model was developed. Nor is it reasonable to expect that a large, general medical/surgical database would contain all of the information for addressing all the requirements of current and future trials. Although this should not deter one from the use of such models, it should make investigators wary of comparisons between the predicted mortality rate given by a model derived from a large database and the observed mortality rate in a precisely defined group. The probability can be used to stratify patients by level of severity at the onset of the trial, but conclusions about observed and predicted outcome should be drawn with care.

In a critique of scoring systems Loirat [26] suggested using a simpler tool without assigned weights for acute diseases. Such a disease-independent assessment of severity could be used to derive a disease-specific model using one-half of the patients in a control group. The model would be applied to the patients in the other one-half of the control group and the patients in the treatment

group, and comparisons of observed and predicted outcome between the two groups could be made to evaluate the success of the treatment.

It must also be noted that the present general models have all been developed for use at very specific time periods, either at admission to the ICU ( $MPM_0$ ), during the first 24 h of the ICU stay (SAPS II, APACHE III), or at three 24-h time points of the ICU stay ( $MPM_{24}$ ,  $MPM_{48}$ ,  $MPM_{72}$ ). These models are not automatically transferable for use in stratifying patients at time of randomization in a clinical trial if this time point lies outside the time limits during which the models were intended to be applied. Research is necessary to confirm that severity at the time of randomization is accurately measured by these models (i.e., to confirm that they are well calibrated at the intended time period).

## Conclusion

In an editorial Selker [27] stated that the desirable characteristics of risk-adjusted mortality predictors are that they be time-insensitive predictive instruments, based on the first minutes of hospital presentation, not affected by whether a patient is hospitalized, based on data collected in the usual care of patients, calibrated with a high degree of precision, integrated into computer systems, independent of the diagnosis-related groups system, and open for inspection and testing. These criteria are probably utopian, and the ideal scoring systems remains to be discovered. The available ICU scoring systems reviewed in this article are, however, based on rigorous research and have reported excellent calibration and discrimination.

Regarding the critical point of view we wish to stress the following: SAPS 3 seems very promising. It is currently the most recent and sophisticated model. The original models may be used to score patients' severity and make comparison of severity over years. The customized models are easy to obtain from the existing databases. The expanded SAPS II, simple to obtain from the existing data bases, may be used to compare performances over time.

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Daniel De Backer

## Oxygen transport— the oxygen delivery controversy

### The concept of oxygen delivery

The amount of oxygen available to the cell is determined by a number of central and peripheral factors. Central factors are related to the adequacy of cardiorespiratory function (cardiac index and  $\text{PaO}_2$ ) and hemoglobin concentration, according to the formula given in Table 1. Peripheral factors are related to the redistribution of cardiac output to the various organs and to regulation of the microcirculation. The latter mechanism is primarily determined by the autonomic control of vascular tone and local microvascular responses and to the degree of affinity of the hemoglobin molecule for oxygen. Among the central factors, cardiac output is the most important determinant of  $\text{DO}_2$  (Table 1). Indeed, a fall in hemoglobin concentration or arterial oxygen saturation ( $\text{SaO}_2$ ) can be compensated for by an increase in cardiac output, whereas the opposite is not true. Likewise, to increase  $\text{DO}_2$ ,  $\text{SaO}_2$  is normally close to 100% and the hemoglobin concentration cannot change acutely. In addition, blood transfusions do not systematically increase  $\text{DO}_2$ , because cardiac output usually decreases as a result of the associated increase in blood viscosity. Hence, cardiac output must constantly adapt to the oxygen needs of the body in physiological conditions.

Peripheral factors can be substantially altered in inflammatory conditions (including sepsis), where local

### Introduction

Most cellular activities require energy in the form of oxygen, primarily obtained from the degradation of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) and other high-energy compounds. Oxygen must be present in sufficient amounts in the mitochondria to maintain effective concentrations of ATP in the electron transport system. Cells have to perform a series of activities essential for survival, including membrane transport, growth, cellular repair and maintenance processes. In addition, cells often have facultative functions such as contractility, electrolyte or protein transport, motility and various biosynthetic activities. If oxygen availability is limited, cellular oxygen consumption may fall and become supply-dependent. Facultative functions are the first to be altered, leading to organ dysfunction. If the situation becomes more serious, obligatory functions can no longer be maintained and irreversible alterations may occur.

It is thus fundamental to maintain sufficient oxygen availability to the cell; the hypoxic cell is doomed to become dysfunctional and to die. Maintenance of adequate oxygen delivery ( $\text{DO}_2$ ) is essential to preserve organ function, as a low  $\text{DO}_2$  is a direct path to organ failure and death.

**Table 1** The determinants of oxygen delivery, oxygen consumption and oxygen extraction

$$\text{Oxygen delivery } (\text{DO}_2) = \text{CI} \times \text{Hb} \times \text{SaO}_2 \times C \times 10$$

$$\text{Oxygen consumption } (\text{VO}_2) = \text{CI} \times \text{CaO}_2 - \text{CvO}_2 \times 10$$

$$(\text{neglecting the dissolved oxygen}) = \text{CI} \times \text{Hb} \times (\text{SaO}_2 - \text{SvO}_2) \times C$$

$$\text{Oxygen extraction } (\text{O}_2\text{ER}) = \text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2 = (\text{CaO}_2 - \text{CvO}_2)/\text{CaO}_2$$

$$(\text{neglecting the dissolved oxygen}) = (\text{SaO}_2 - \text{SvO}_2)/\text{SaO}_2$$

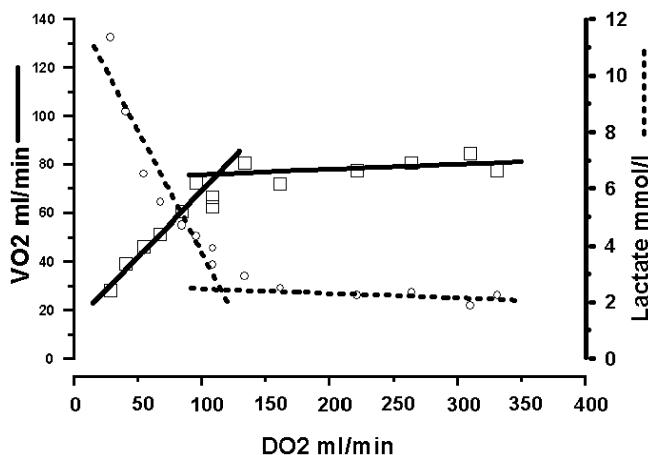
*CO* cardiac output, *Hb* hemoglobin concentration, *SaO<sub>2</sub>* arterial oxygen saturation, *SvO<sub>2</sub>* mixed venous oxygen saturation, *C* constant value: representing the amount of oxygen bound to 1 g of Hb (this value is usually 1.34 or 1.39)

control of vascular tone may be altered, the formation of microthrombi may shut down some capillaries and the development of edema may contribute to altering the distribution of blood flow. Changes in the oxygen affinity of hemoglobin can also influence the peripheral delivery of oxygen. Importantly, the oxygen extraction capabilities of the tissues are primarily determined by the matching of microvascular blood flow to microregional oxygen demand, a heterogeneity of capillary perfusion leading to oxygen consumption ( $\text{VO}_2$ )/ $\text{DO}_2$  mismatch [1] and hence alterations in oxygen extraction [1, 2].

### **Back to basics—the relationship between oxygen consumption and oxygen delivery and the concept of oxygen consumption/oxygen delivery dependency**

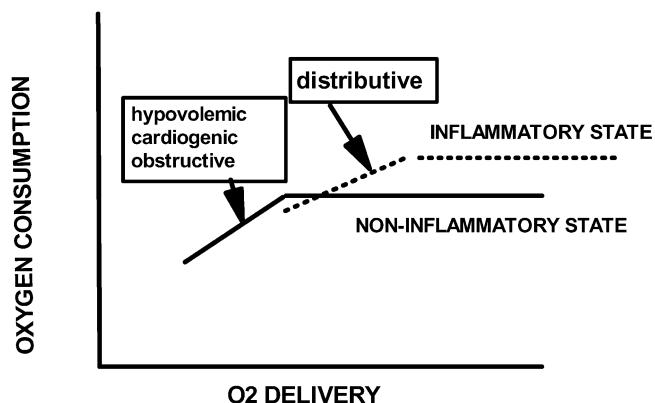
The animal experiments by Cain [3], Schumacker [4] and others [5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12] provided the fundamental data to characterize the relationship between  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$ .  $\text{VO}_2$  is independent of  $\text{DO}_2$  over a wide range of values, because oxygen extraction can readily adapt to the changes in  $\text{DO}_2$ . Hence, when  $\text{DO}_2$  is acutely reduced by a decrease in blood flow (cardiac output), in hemoglobin concentration (anemia) or in hemoglobin oxygen saturation (hypoxemia), oxygen extraction increases (mixed venous oxygen saturation [ $\text{SvO}_2$ ] decreases) and  $\text{VO}_2$  remains stable for a long time. It is only when  $\text{DO}_2$  falls below a critically low value ( $\text{DO}_{2\text{crit}}$ ), that  $\text{VO}_2$  starts to fall. An abrupt increase in blood lactate concentration then occurs, indicating the development of anaerobic metabolism (Fig. 1).

Low flow (hypovolemic, cardiogenic and obstructive types of shock), anemic and hypoxic hypoxia are char-



**Fig. 1** Relationship between oxygen consumption ( $\text{VO}_2$ ) and oxygen delivery ( $\text{DO}_2$ ) when  $\text{DO}_2$  is acutely reduced by tamponade or hemorrhage in anesthetized animals (data pooled from several studies). Note that blood lactate levels increase as soon as  $\text{DO}_2$  falls below a critically low value ( $\text{DO}_{2\text{crit}}$ )

### **SHOCK STATES**



**Fig. 2** Schematic representation of the four types of acute circulatory failure. Importantly, several types of shock may coexist

acterized by a decreased  $\text{DO}_2$  but preserved oxygen extraction ratio ( $\text{O}_2\text{ER}$ , the ratio of  $\text{DO}_2$  to  $\text{VO}_2$ ) so that the  $\text{DO}_{2\text{crit}}$  remains normal. In distributive shock, the oxygen extraction capabilities are altered so that the critical  $\text{O}_2\text{ER}$  is typically decreased. These situations are typically associated with an increased  $\text{DO}_{2\text{crit}}$ , and in these conditions  $\text{VO}_2$  can become dependent on  $\text{DO}_2$  even when the latter is normal or elevated. These observations have been made after endotoxin administration [13] as well after injection of live bacteria [14]. Taken together, these observations help to characterize the four principal types of circulatory shock (Fig. 2). Admittedly, this classification is somewhat simplistic as several types of alteration may coexist, in particular in cardiogenic shock [15].

### **The clinical controversies**

There are at least two controversies in the human application of these physiological data. One surrounds the concept of ‘non-physiological’  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency, and the other the need to increase  $\text{DO}_2$  to supranormal values.

The first controversy—‘non-physiological’ oxygen consumption/oxygen delivery dependency

Early human studies [16, 17, 18] suggested that patients with the acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) may have  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency. However, these studies had methodological problems in that pooled data were obtained from the patients.

Subsequent investigations indicated that  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency may occur in some individuals but not others. Some studies related the phenomenon to hyperlactatemia,

as  $\text{VO}_2$  increased when  $\text{DO}_2$  was increased with i.v. fluids or vasoactive agents in patients with high lactate concentrations but not in those with normal lactate concentrations [19, 20, 21, 22]. Bihari et al. [23] related the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon to survival, as they observed that a prostacyclin infusion was associated with an increase in  $\text{VO}_2$  primarily in non-survivors.

Several groups of investigators have challenged these concepts on the basis of various arguments.

#### *First argument: limitations of blood lactate concentrations*

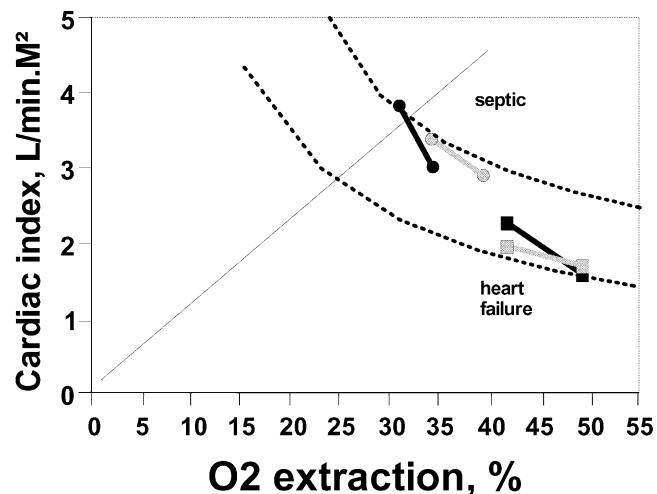
The use of blood lactate concentrations in some of these studies may not faithfully identify patients with  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency. Moreover, elevated blood lactate concentrations do not necessarily reflect anaerobic metabolism secondary to cellular hypoxia. Other mechanisms, including increased glycolysis, altered lactate clearance and abnormal pyruvate metabolism may contribute to the hyperlactatemia observed in septic states.

**Response:** It is true that hyperlactatemia alone is not sufficient to affirm the presence of  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency, but should complement the clinical signs of altered tissue perfusion. After all, the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  phenomenon is a hallmark of acute circulatory failure (shock). Even though the limitations of blood lactate concentrations must be well understood [24], increased lactate concentrations remain a reliable prognostic indicator, actually superior to  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  values [25].

#### *Second argument: mathematical coupling of data*

There are important methodological problems in the assessment of  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationships. Most studies evaluating the relationship between  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  have calculated  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  from the same variables, i.e., cardiac output, hemoglobin concentrations and  $\text{SaO}_2$ , thus resulting in mathematical coupling of data. Some have argued that  $\text{VO}_2$  should be 'measured' from the expired gas analysis rather than 'calculated'. Importantly, the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon has never been reported when indirect calorimetry has been used to determine  $\text{VO}_2$  independently.

**Response:** Possible methodological problems cannot be neglected. However, the determination of  $\text{VO}_2$  by direct measurement may not be better for several reasons. First, even though people sometimes refer to 'calculated versus measured', they overlook the fact that  $\text{VO}_2$  is always calculated as flow (blood flow or gas flow) times oxygen content difference (between arterial and venous blood or between inspired and expired gases). In fact, the formula used to 'calculate'  $\text{VO}_2$  by indirect calorimetry is quite complex. Second, indirect calorimetry has its own



**Fig. 3** Cardiac index/oxygen extraction ratio ( $\text{O}_2\text{ER}$ ) diagram during a short-term dobutamine infusion indicating oxygen consumption ( $\text{VO}_2$ )/oxygen delivery ( $\text{DO}_2$ ) dependency in patients with increased lactate levels (black bars) but not in those with normal lactate levels (gray bars) (data from [22]). The line of reference refers to the physiological response to exercise. The curved dotted lines represent isopleths of various levels of  $\text{VO}_2$ . If  $\text{VO}_2$  remains stable and is independent of  $\text{DO}_2$ , data points on the diagram move parallel to the  $\text{VO}_2$  isopleths; if there is  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency, data points will cross  $\text{VO}_2$  isopleths

limitations and sources of error, especially when high  $\text{FiO}_2$  are required. Also indirect calorimetry is a cumbersome method; it takes time to prepare and is not easily accessible in urgent conditions. Hence, patients studied with this technique have usually been stabilized. In such stable patients, no  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon could be documented by either method [26].

The importance of methodological problems is probably less serious than sometimes considered. First, a complex analysis by Stratton et al. [27] revealed that the methodological problems due to estimations of  $\text{VO}_2$  and  $\text{DO}_2$  are probably of minor magnitude when the increase in  $\text{DO}_2$  is significant. Second, different responses have been reported in various groups of patients including survivors versus non-survivors [23], patients with or without hyperlactatemia [20, 21, 22] and hemodynamically stable or unstable patients [28]. The changes in  $\text{DO}_2$  were similar in the two groups so that the risk of mathematical coupling was not limited to the group with  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency. Third, similar observations have been made using the cardiac index/ $\text{O}_2\text{ER}$  relationship, which does not have any problem with mathematical coupling of data (Fig. 3).

### *Third argument: the thermogenic effects of catecholamines*

Dobutamine has been used to disclose the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon [22], but this catecholamine may increase  $\text{VO}_2$  in all individuals. The mechanisms involve, in part, increased cellular metabolism primarily under the influence of beta-adrenergic stimulation and, in part, the increase in blood flow that is associated with increased cardiac work and increased oxygen demand by the heart and organs like the kidney and the liver, whose needs are proportional to the blood flow. Importantly, these metabolic effects may vary according to the individual [29].

*Response:* the thermogenic effects of catecholamines cannot be neglected, but are relatively limited for dobutamine [26, 30] and less significant than for epinephrine. Moreover, a study comparing the effects of dobutamine to those of sodium nitroprusside in volunteers indicated a similar increase in  $\text{VO}_2$  with the two molecules [31]; hence this phenomenon is probably limited.

### *Fourth argument: observations made in dying patients*

Such studies performed in anesthetized animals can hardly be reproduced in humans, where an acute reduction in  $\text{DO}_2$  would be unethical in most situations. However, Ronco and collaborators [32] did demonstrate the same phenomenon in dying patients in whom life support treatment was withdrawn. Importantly, they showed that the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon appeared only at very low  $\text{DO}_2$  values, thus indicating that the phenomenon may occur only in extreme conditions.

*Response:* although very interesting these observations made in patients in the final stages of the disease process may not apply to all critically ill patients.

So can  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency exist in patients? On the basis of these observations, one can conclude that:

1.  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency does NOT exist globally in stable, critically ill patients, even in those with sepsis or ARDS [33].
2.  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency DOES exist in severe cases of circulatory shock, when blood flow is significantly reduced.
3.  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency MAY exist globally in patients with septic shock and perhaps regionally in patients with severe sepsis. However, global measurements are not precise enough to guide therapy effectively and regional measurements cannot be obtained routinely in critically ill patients. Thus it remains difficult to define where the limit can be drawn.

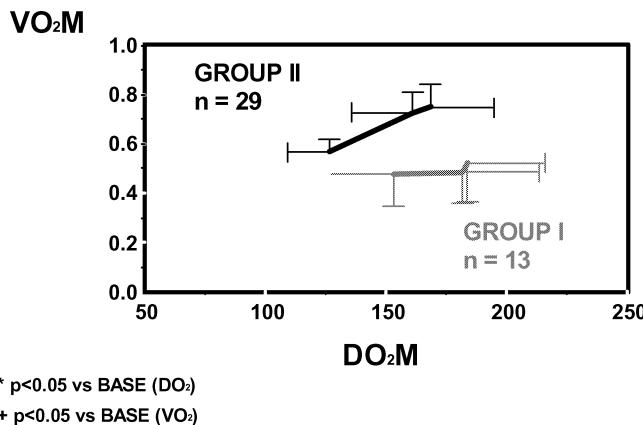
The second controversy: supranormal oxygen delivery versus the regional versus the 'individual' approach

### *The supranormal oxygen delivery approach*

If inadequate tissue oxygenation can result in organ failure, one might suggest creating and maintaining supranormal  $\text{DO}_2$  values for all patients at risk of complications, to ensure sufficient cellular oxygen availability. This idea is based on the observation that those who do well usually have higher  $\text{DO}_2$  values than those who develop complications. Using these values in survivors as reference values, William Shoemaker and his colleagues [34] suggested that this strategy of achieving supranormal  $\text{DO}_2$  (to at least 600 ml/min per  $\text{m}^2$ ) may result in better outcomes. Although this approach may have merits in some populations [35, 36], it has several problems. First, it may be true that patients with a high cardiac output and  $\text{DO}_2$  are more likely to survive, but this may simply be a marker of their physiological reserve. In other words, it may be that survivors are more likely to be able to generate a higher cardiac output, whereas patients who are elderly or with severe cardiorespiratory compromise may not be able to generate a high cardiac output and innately have a higher risk of death. Second, calculation of  $\text{DO}_2$  (and other derived variables) is not only complex but prone to errors. Every primary variable is approximated and multiplying the values carries the risk of amplifying these errors. Third, and most importantly, increasing  $\text{DO}_2$  to supranormal values in all patients 'at risk' may be helpful to some, but harmful to others. Pouring fluids and adrenergic agents into patients who do not need them can be expected to be harmful. Hence the benefit to some patients may be largely outweighed by the detrimental effects on others. Stated bluntly, this concept is an oversimplification of a complex phenomenon. When applied to a mixed group of critically ill patients, such strategies have been shown to be ineffective [37] and may even be harmful, especially if high doses of dobutamine are administered [38].

### *The regional approach*

Unfortunately, global determinations of  $\text{DO}_2$  and  $\text{VO}_2$  may not be sensitive enough to be clinically relevant. Importantly, they may fail to detect regional perfusion abnormalities. In particular, the splanchnic circulation is thought to be important and regional measurements have shown the  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency phenomenon in the hepatosplanchnic circulation. De Backer et al. evaluated hepatosplanchnic  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  relationships by the introduction of a catheter into the suprahepatic vein [39]. Some patients demonstrated regional  $\text{VO}_2/\text{DO}_2$  dependency and others did not, although there were no differences in clinical or biochemical parameters (Fig. 4).



\* p<0.05 vs BASE (DO<sub>2</sub>)

+ p<0.05 vs BASE (VO<sub>2</sub>)

**Fig. 4** Regional oxygen consumption (VO<sub>2</sub>)/oxygen delivery (DO<sub>2</sub>) relationship in the splanchnic circulation in patients with severe sepsis. Group I: patients with gradient between mixed venous and hepatic venous oxygen saturation lower than or equal to 10%. Group II: patients with gradient between mixed venous and hepatic venous oxygen saturation higher than 10%. Data are presented as means  $\pm$  SEM. (adapted from [39] with permission). VO<sub>2</sub>M and DO<sub>2</sub>M refer to mesenteric VO<sub>2</sub> and DO<sub>2</sub>, respectively

Unfortunately, these measurements are not easily accessible, so limiting the application of a common monitoring technique. The use of a dobutamine infusion using gastric tonometry may help to identify patients who may have such a phenomenon [40].

#### The individualized approach

Many investigators prefer a titrated, individualized approach, with the aim of classifying patients by careful clinical evaluation and paraclinical tests including measurements of cardiac index, SvO<sub>2</sub>, blood lactate concentrations and, perhaps, regional PCO<sub>2</sub>. This requires a complete understanding of the pathophysiological alterations.

To evaluate the relationship between VO<sub>2</sub> and DO<sub>2</sub> in a simplified way, one may construct a cardiac index/O<sub>2</sub>ER diagram [41] (Fig. 3). The study of such variables also avoids cumbersome calculations, as cardiac index is a primary variable and O<sub>2</sub>ER can be very simply calculated (Table 1). However, in most cases, SvO<sub>2</sub> or even central venous oxygen saturation (ScvO<sub>2</sub>) alone may suffice. Rivers et al. [42], using oxygen saturation in the superior vena cava as a guide, showed that early goal-directed therapy could result in significantly lower mortality rates in patients with severe sepsis and septic shock. Likewise, Polonen et al. [43] found that this approach shortened hospital stays and reduced the degree of organ dysfunction at the time of hospital discharge in

cardiac surgery patients. Hence, in addition to standard clinical evaluation, repeated measurements of blood lactate and SvO<sub>2</sub> may be helpful. Measurement of base excess may also be used to assess the imbalance between oxygen supply and delivery by quantifying the metabolic acidosis that results from the anaerobic metabolism [44]. However, as with blood lactate levels, there are many causes of metabolic acidosis and, hence, an abnormal base excess in critically ill patients (including renal failure, ketoacidosis, convulsions, etc.), and its interpretation may not be straightforward. The proper evaluation of the critically ill patient thus requires the integration of several factors, including measurement of DO<sub>2</sub>, urine output, blood lactate concentrations, base excess, SvO<sub>2</sub> and, maybe, some indices of regional perfusion such as gastric tonometry. If there is doubt, a DO<sub>2</sub> challenge may be performed to rule out VO<sub>2</sub>/DO<sub>2</sub> dependency, but the errors in measurements may sometimes lead to inadequate interpretation.

#### Conclusions

The relationship between VO<sub>2</sub>/DO<sub>2</sub> remains an important concept, even though its application to guide therapy may be too simplistic. Discussion of this important area leads us back to simple but important recommendations:

- Patients with signs of poor tissue perfusion, such as arterial hypotension, slow capillary refill, oliguria or high blood lactate concentrations, may benefit from further administration of fluid and/or inotropic agents like dobutamine.
- Monitoring of SvO<sub>2</sub> represents a simplification that may be helpful, and algorithms may be constructed to guide therapy along with these measurements.
- Although one may argue that lactate concentrations reflect other cellular abnormalities than anaerobic metabolism secondary to hypoxia, the time course of lactate levels remain valuable, so that increased lactate levels should indicate an alarm signal.
- In the absence of notable renal failure, measuring base deficit may provide a useful indication of inadequate oxygenation.

Whatever the cause of shock, maintaining adequate tissue oxygenation is critical. In the evaluation of tissue oxygenation none of the available monitors alone is ideal, and decisions regarding the need for strategies to increase and maintain oxygen delivery must thus be based on the combined interpretation of repeated measurements of clinical, biochemical and oxygenation parameters.

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# Organ dysfunction during sepsis

**Abstract** *Background:* Multiple organ dysfunction syndrome is the commonest reason for sepsis-associated mortality. *Discussion:* In the 40 years since it was first described understanding of its pathophysiology has improved, and novel methodologies for monitoring and severity of illness scoring have emerged. These, together with the development of systematic strategies for managing organ dysfunction in sepsis, and potentially effective new therapeutic interventions, should assist in reducing sepsis-associated mortality. *Conclusion:* These historical developments are discussed,

and the reader is directed to these references for further guidance.

**Keywords** Multiple organ dysfunction syndrome · Sepsis · Microvascular dysfunction · Cytopathic hypoxia · Bioenergetic failure · Scoring system

## Introduction

### Sepsis: historical perspective

The term sepsis is derived from the Greek word *sepsin*, which means ‘to make putrid’. Early descriptions of disease mediated by “small invisible creatures” were made in the second century B.C., and the concepts of contagion and isolation of diseased individuals followed. Despite attempts at prevention pan-epidemic infections have caused the deaths of millions of persons throughout history. The first documented observations of living bacteria were made by van Leeuwenhoek in 1674 and classification of bacterial morphology in the early nineteenth century. However, the relationship between infectious disease, its aetiology, and its pathogenesis remained elusive.

The principles of disinfection and anti-septic practices pioneered by Semmelweis and later by Lister were adopted only several decades later. The importance of the host response to infection was first described in the 1880s and

classified separately in terms of cell-mediated and humoral immunity. The subsequent use of drug anti-metabolites to ameliorate the effects of syphilis at the turn of the century, and the discovery of antibiotic sulphonamides, moulds and vaccination, led to a revolution in the treatment and prevention of infection. It was believed that these developments had the potential of eradicating sepsis from the modern age, but the problems of changing disease patterns and antibiotic resistance dampened early ambitions and sepsis has remained a formidable problem in many areas of medical practice.

### Sepsis and multiple organ dysfunction: epidemiology

Sepsis, the host response to an infectious process, is termed severe when complicated by predefined organ system dysfunction [1]. Together, the systemic inflammatory response syndrome (SIRS), sepsis and septic shock have been termed the ‘sepsis syndromes’ [1, 2, 3]. The

nature of infectious organisms associated with sepsis is changing. Thus, whilst Gram-negative bacteria were traditionally responsible for the majority of hospital-acquired infections, Gram-positive organisms (30–50% of cases) and multidrug-resistant bacteria or fungi (25%) are now more common [4, 5]. Moreover, the burden of sepsis-related disease is also rising; from 82.7 to 240.4 cases per 100,000 population in the United States and to 51 cases per 100,000 population (1997 figures) in the United Kingdom, where 27.1% of adult ICU admissions had severe sepsis in the first 24 h [6].

Severe sepsis and shock are characterised by tissue hypoperfusion, cellular hypoxia and metabolic dysfunction. Consequently the majority of patients with SIRS and its sequelae who fail to survive succumb to multiple organ dysfunction syndrome (MODS). Multiple organ failure (i.e. demonstrable failure of two or more organs) within the ICU was first documented in 1977. Bacterial sepsis was aetiologically significant in 69% of the cases described [7]. Indeed, the onset of MODS, synonymous with multiple organ system failure, was thought originally to follow a temporal sequence (lung, liver, gastric mucosa and kidney) [8]. Moreover, whilst strongly linked to uncontrolled infection (in particular intra-abdominal), it is now recognised that MODS can occur independently of sepsis. The commonest manifestation of MODS is acute lung injury, defined by refractory hypoxaemia attributable to high permeability pulmonary oedema [9]. Its extreme manifestation, the acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), occurs in more than 40% of patients with sepsis and severe sepsis [6, 10].

There has been an evolution in the appreciation of mechanisms that result in sepsis and subsequent MODS. Thus, initially, a link between infections, which were recognised and treated and their inflammatory consequences was not appreciated. Indeed, progression to MODS, in spite of evidence of clearing of infection, nurtured the hypothesis of the body's response to infection associated systemic inflammation (by now autonomous from the initial infection) as being crucial to outcome. The process of increasing understanding of sepsis-associated MODS has required a number of key components, namely: (a) defining the biophysiological pathways arising from a systemic inflammatory insult, (b) clear epidemiological definitions of the spectrum of sepsis syndromes (often misused terms), (c) understanding the pathophysiological processes of the clinically apparent systemic disturbances during early and later stages and (d) testing different therapeutic approaches, directed at specific implicated inflammatory markers or at abnormal physiological parameters. Many therapeutic 'bedside' approaches have been proven wrong, yet providing insights into further 'bench' studies.

In summary, the sepsis syndromes and their sequelae, specifically MODS, represent the leading cause of death in adult general ICUs, with an associated mortality of

30–45%, consumption of 45% of ICU and 33% of hospital bed days and an estimated cost of \$16.7 billion [6, 11].

## **Pathophysiology of MODS in sepsis**

It is unknown why sepsis progresses to MODS in only certain individuals, or what the exact pathway is that leads to this. If the inflammatory process that characterises the systemic response to infectious pathogens becomes self-sustaining and progressive, organ dysfunction ensues. An extraordinarily complex and intricate cascade of inflammatory mediators, extra- and intracellular cell signalling pathways is activated. Prevailing wisdom suggests that these result in either microvascular dysregulation and/or mitochondrial dysfunction (so-called cytopathic hypoxia). These processes result in tissue hypoperfusion, and a further cascade of biochemical-physical alterations culminating in MODS [12].

### **Microvascular dysfunction**

Early in the course of sepsis cardiac output (CO) rises to maintain blood pressure and organ perfusion in the face of reduced peripheral vascular resistance (hyperdynamic sepsis). As sepsis progresses, cardiac output is frequently reduced (so-called hypodynamic sepsis), which has a poor prognosis. Cardiac dysfunction per se is apparent in up to 44% of critically ill septic patients, with the aetiological agents suspected to be circulating depressant factors. Myocardial function tends to recover in survivors, and the prognostic significance of dysfunction in sepsis remains debatable [13]. Redistribution of capillary blood flow has been demonstrated in both animal models and in clinical sepsis [14, 15]. The use of investigatory tools such as intravital videomicroscopy, now applicable in the clinical setting, has provided evidence of simultaneous structural and functional abnormalities in sepsis, strengthening the association between tissue hypoperfusion and organ dysfunction. However, contradictory evidence from animal studies suggests that such hypoperfusion does not invariably lead to organ dysfunction and death.

### **Cytopathic hypoxia**

Elevated tissue oxygen levels have been demonstrated in animals during experimental sepsis and in human skeletal muscle, suggesting that cellular inefficiency of oxygen utilisation rather than a failure of oxygen delivery ( $\text{DO}_2$ ) to tissues occurs in sepsis. By contrast, in cardiogenic shock tissue oxygen is reduced [16, 17]. Tissue oxygen consumption occurs normally principally through ATP production by oxidative phosphorylation in mitochondria. Reduced ATP concentrations in skeletal muscle during

sepsis are associated with increasing severity of, and poor outcome from, septic shock [18]. The pathophysiological consequences of both regional flow alterations and mitochondrial dysfunction undoubtedly co-exist in the septic state, but do not appear to lead to significant histopathological correlates detectable at post-mortem examination.

### Inflammatory cytokines in sepsis

The development of sequential organ failure in critically ill patients with sepsis is strongly predictive of mortality. However, the mechanisms involved in the dynamic interaction between different organ systems are dictated by the intricate interplay of haemodynamics, oxygen transport and metabolic disturbances. Genetic predisposition is almost certainly relevant in upregulating the expression of inflammatory mediators [e.g. tumour necrosis factor (TNF), interleukin (IL) 1, IL-8, triggering receptor on myeloid cells 1, high mobility group box 1], thereby influencing adversely the anti-/pro-inflammatory balance. Genetic predisposition seems more important for some infectious diseases such as meningococcaemia, but polymorphisms such as for TNF- $\alpha$  gene promoter can play a more general role in susceptibility to septic shock associated mortality [19]. Neuroendocrine systems and prothrombotic pathways (e.g. tissue factor) are activated with downregulation of fibrinolytic systems (i.e. anti-thrombin III, activated protein C and tissue factor pathway inhibitor) [20]. Inflammatory mediators TNF, IL-1, nitric oxide and reactive oxygen species are believed to disrupt communication pathways between organs which precedes organ failure [21]. Indeed, epithelial dysfunction has been proposed as a final common pathway for organ dysfunction in sepsis [22]. The tight junctions between these cells are affected in experimental models of sepsis. This may be particularly relevant in the gastrointestinal tract, which has been variously proposed as the 'seat of sepsis' and the 'motor of multiple organ failure' [23, 24]. Bacterial translocation (i.e. direct transcellular transport of microbes from the enterocytes to the submucosal layer) across a permeable intestinal luminal mucosa into the splanchnic circulation has been proposed as the initiator and propagator of sepsis following a remote insult. Mechanisms for this mucosal injury are multifactorial, including reduced intestinal blood flow and tissue hypoxia. Impaired hepatic clearance of toxins may also be relevant [25, 26, 27].

The prevailing theories of sepsis as an uncontrolled inflammatory response, which have been based on extensive animal studies, do not necessarily reflect the human clinical pattern. They used relatively large doses of bacteria or endotoxin and mortality was therefore the result of a 'cytokine storm', that if blocked improved survival. Meningococcaemia is perhaps the only human

form of sepsis in which circulating levels of TNF- $\alpha$  are high and correlated with mortality [28]. Furthermore, there is much evidence of immune suppression during sepsis. Anergy (a state of non-responsiveness to antigen) through lymphocyte apoptosis has been demonstrable in vivo, and from autopsy studies of patients dying from sepsis [29]. Cellular hibernation or 'stunning' as occurs during myocardial ischaemia has been postulated as a mechanism for sepsis-associated MODS based on the notable findings of discordance between histological findings and the degree of organ dysfunction from patients who died of sepsis [30].

An emerging concept is the variable immune response during sepsis; from hyperimmune to hypoimmune, depending on factors that include virulence of the organism, size of the inoculum, pre-existing co-morbidity, genetic polymorphisms in candidate genes and the inflammatory insults during the course of sepsis. Therefore it is perhaps too simplistic to consider an overactive immune system as the reason for sepsis and associated MODS but rather a dynamic state where a severely compromised immune system might prevent adequate eradication of pathogens [29].

### Clinical relevance of organ dysfunction: severity of illness scoring systems

Scoring systems as risk prediction tools rely on acute derangements in acute physiological parameters which are numerically assigned by degree and aggregated. Such generic (as distinct from disease-specific) scoring systems are best exemplified by the Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation (APACHE) system [31] which has led to the development of a number of other organ-based failure scores [32, 33, 34, 35].

Perhaps the most widely applied in current practice is the Sequential Organ Failure Assessment Score (SOFA, previously called the Sepsis-Related Organ Failure Assessment). Daily SOFA scores provide an important physiological tracking system for the dynamic course of critically ill patients with sepsis. Whilst not designed for mortality prediction, worse scores are strongly associated with mortality [36]; the mean and highest SOFA scores are predictors of poor prognosis, whilst a worsening of SOFA within the first 48 h predicts the likelihood of mortality 50% or higher [37]. However, whether organ-based scoring systems direct the timing, degree and duration of appropriate interventions to prevent MODS in sepsis is uncertain.

### Detecting organ dysfunction in sepsis

Continuous monitoring of clinical and physiological variables, recognition of the significance of any changes in monitored parameters, and an appropriate response, are

the cornerstones and defining characteristic of modern-day intensive care medicine. Electrocardiographic, peripheral temperature (as an indicator of shock or its response) [38], non-invasive oxygen saturations [39], arterial blood gas, end tidal CO<sub>2</sub>, metabolism (i.e. lactate), central venous, and cardiac output monitoring have become routine in practice. Specific organ system monitoring can guide management in certain circumstances such as intracranial pressure monitoring in traumatic head injury [40], whilst other more novel techniques such as gastric tonometry, and hepatic blood flow devices are under evaluation in the setting of sepsis [41].

#### Metabolic monitoring

Hyperlactataemia is multifactorial in origin. Nevertheless, there is a good relationship in sepsis between lactic acidosis, organ failure and poor outcome [42]. Indeed, blood lactate sampling is established and now recommended as an important parameter for monitoring in international guidelines on the management of severe sepsis [43].

#### Cardiac output monitoring

The history of the development of flow-directed, balloon-tipped, pulmonary artery catheters (PAC) saw them adopt a pivotal role in continuous bedside cardiopulmonary monitoring, and coincidentally propagated the value of central venous catheters [44, 45, 46]. However, the SUPPORT [47] investigators identified an increased odds ratio for mortality and resource utilisation with the use of the PAC, even after adjustment for treatment selection bias. The ‘attributable’ morbidity associated with PAC use was thought more likely due to misinterpretation of the values thereby derived than to physical complications on insertion [48]. However, such work has led to the development of a number of other monitoring devices utilising arterial waveform analysis (i.e. pulse contour cardiac output, lithium dilution cardiac output), oesophageal Doppler and bioimpedance. Whilst all are relatively less invasive than the PAC, none provides the additional information about the pulmonary circulation. By contrast, the use of echocardiography is becoming more widespread in assessing cardiac function in sepsis [49, 50, 51, 52].

#### Mixed venous oxygen saturation

The value of reduced mixed venous oxygen tensions/saturations sampled from indwelling PACs as an accurate reflection of inadequate DO<sub>2</sub> due to reduced CO in cardiorespiratory failure was first demonstrated in patients undergoing cardiac surgery in whom a close correlation between venous oxygen saturation, CO and

outcome was demonstrated [53]. Central venous oxygen saturation is now regarded as a crucial physiological surrogate for identifying and directing the correction of ‘hidden’ oxygen debt [54, 55, 56].

#### Management of organ dysfunction in sepsis

The principles of management of severe sepsis and associated organ dysfunction have evolved concomitantly with an increasing evidence base. Some critical concepts and studies that have helped this development are discussed below.

#### Diagnosis, source control and anti-microbial therapy

Early diagnosis of infection, ‘source control’ and appropriate anti-microbial treatment have been reported as crucial to outcome in sepsis for many years [57]. By contrast, up to eight-fold higher mortality is observed in prospective cohort studies of antibiotic misuse [58, 59], while inadequate surgical source control predicts MODS and increases mortality [7, 60].

#### Resuscitation-fluid management

Prompt and adequate haemodynamic resuscitation in patients with severe sepsis is pivotal in preventing progression to MODS and death. International recommendations suggest achieving a central venous pressure of 8–12 mmHg (or 12–15 mmHg in mechanically ventilated patients [56]. Which type of fluid replacement (i.e. crystalloid vs. colloid or albumin) to administer is more contentious [61, 62, 63], although a recent position statement by the American Thoracic Society is helpful in this regards [64].

#### Haemodynamic goals in sepsis

Fluid resuscitation in septic shock is directed at achieving adequate tissue perfusion and oxygenation, thereby overcoming tissue oxygen ‘debt’ which relates in part to inadequate DO<sub>2</sub>. However, an early demonstration that dobutamine and adequate volume resuscitation improve DO<sub>2</sub> (and oxygen consumption, VO<sub>2</sub>) as well as haemodynamic parameters post-operatively [65, 66, 67] was not reproduced in patients with sepsis-induced organ failures. Indeed, a strategy of goal directed supranormal oxygen delivery (cardiac index 4.5 l min<sup>-1</sup> m<sup>-2</sup>, DO<sub>2</sub> > 60 ml min<sup>-1</sup> m<sup>-2</sup>, VO<sub>2</sub> > 170 ml min<sup>-1</sup> m<sup>-2</sup>) using dobutamine in volume resuscitated critically ill patients increased mortality (54%) compared to controls (34%) [68]. In fact, the dobutamine-‘driven’ patients did not increase

**Table 1** Diagnostic criteria for sepsis and associated organ dysfunction in adults. Adapted from [2]: infection (documented or suspected—a pathological process induced by a micro-organism) and some of the following variables

General	
Temperature	<36 °C or >38.3 °C (core temperature)
Heart rate	>90 min <sup>-1</sup> (or >2 SD above the normal value)
Tachypnoea	
Altered mental status	
Significant oedema or positive fluid balance	>20 ml/kg over 24 h)
Plasma glucose	>120 mg/dl (7.7 mmol/l) if not diabetic
Inflammatory	
White blood cell count	12,000 µl <sup>-1</sup> or <4000 µl <sup>-1</sup> (or >10% immature forms)
Plasma C-reactive protein	>2 SD above normal
Plasma procalcitonin	>2 SD above normal
Haemodynamic	
Arterial hypotension	Systolic blood pressure <90 mmHg, mean arterial blood pressure <70, or fall in systolic blood pressure >40 mmHg below normal)
Mixed venous oxygen saturation	<70%
Cardiac index	<3.5 l min <sup>-1</sup> m <sup>-2</sup>
Organ dysfunction	
PaO <sub>2</sub> /FIO <sub>2</sub> ratio	<300 mmHg or 40 kPa
Urine output	<0.5 ml kg <sup>-1</sup> h <sup>-1</sup> for at least 2 h
Creatinine increase	>0.5 mg/dl
International normalised ratio	>1.5 or activated partial thromboplastin time >60 s
Illeus	
Platelet count	<100,000/µl
Plasma bilirubin	>4 mg/dl or 70 mmol/l
Tissue perfusion	
Plasma lactate	>1 mmol/l
Decreased capillary refill or mottling	

their VO<sub>2</sub> beyond those of adequately volume resuscitated controls. A second study with similar outcomes [69] helped to establish a number of facts. First, patients with sepsis and septic shock who can improve their haemodynamic indices through adequate fluid resuscitation are likely to do better than those who do not. Second, supra-normal targets for DO<sub>2</sub>/VO<sub>2</sub> are at best unnecessary, and at worst increase mortality. Third, a beneficial response to fluid resuscitation is more likely in the acute phase, before established critical illness. Thus patients with severe sepsis and septic shock resuscitated to standard haemodynamic goals, who additionally achieve central venous oxygen saturation of 70% or higher within the first 6 h by fluid resuscitation, red cell transfusion to a haematocrit of 30%, and/or dobutamine (up to 20 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> min<sup>-1</sup>) display significantly lower 30- and 60-day mortality rates [56].

### Ventilatory strategies

In those patients with sepsis who develop acute lung injury and require mechanical ventilatory support low tidal volumes (approx. 6 ml/kg) and inspiratory plateau pressures below 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O should be used where possible. Such recommendations have emerged from animal studies [70, 71] and a retrospective analysis of patients with ARDS, which demonstrated that pressure-limited ventilation with so-called permissive hypercapnia reduced hospital

mortality compared with APACHE II predictions (18.6% vs. 37.8%) [72]. It was, however, the pivotal ARDSnet study that demonstrated a 9% absolute mortality reduction (31% vs. 39.8% for controls) in patients with ARDS randomised to receive a tidal volume of 6 ml/kg with plateau pressure limited to less than 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O [73]. By contrast, higher positive end expiratory pressures, prone positioning and the use of inhaled nitric oxide and surfactant have demonstrated only short-term improvements in oxygenation. The results of a large randomised controlled trial of steroid therapy in late stage ARDS based upon an encouraging single-centre study are awaited [74].

### Management of renal dysfunction

The importance of maintaining regional perfusion in sepsis is increasingly recognised, not least the hepatosplanchic circulation. Since the first experiences of arteriovenous haemofiltration in anuric intensive care patients with fluid overload resistant to diuretics in the 1970s [75], acute renal failure in the critically ill has been recognised to be of multifactorial aetiology. Hypotension, nephrotoxic drug insults, sepsis and preceding renal dysfunction may all be relevant [76]. Acute renal failure is an independent risk factor for mortality in the critically ill, which varies from 45% to 70% when associated with sepsis [77, 78]. Factors predicting a poor outcome are advanced age, altered pre-

**Table 2** The Sequential Organ failure Assessment score (*MAP* mean arterial blood pressure, *Nor* norepinephrine, *Dop* dopamine, *Dob* dobutamine, *Epi* epinephrine; *FIO<sub>2</sub>* fraction of inspired oxygen, *GCS* Glasgow Coma Scale score) (adapted from [31])

	0	1	2	3	4
Respiratory: PaO <sub>2</sub> /FIO <sub>2</sub> ratio	> 400	≤ 400	≤ 300	≤ 200 <sup>c</sup>	≤ 100 <sup>c</sup>
Coagulation: platelets ( $\times 10^3 \mu\text{l}^{-1}$ ) <sup>a</sup>	> 150	≤ 150	≤ 100	≤ 50	≤ 20
Liver: bilirubin (mg dl <sup>-1</sup> ) <sup>a</sup>	< 1.2	1.2–1.9	2.0–5.9	6.0–11.9	> 12.0
Cardiovascular: hypotension	No hypotension	MAP < 70 mmHg	Dop ≤ 5 or Dob any dose <sup>d</sup>	Dop > 5, Epi ≤ 0.1 or Nor ≤ 0.1 <sup>d</sup>	Dop ≥ 15, Epi > 0.1 or Nor > 0.1 <sup>d</sup>
Central nervous system: GCS	15	13–14	10–12	6–9	< 6
Renal: creatinine (mg dl <sup>-1</sup> ) or daily urine output (ml) <sup>a</sup>	< 1.2	1.2–1.9	2.0–3.4	3.5–4.9 or < 500	> 5 or < 200

<sup>a</sup> To convert bilirubin from mg dl<sup>-1</sup> multiply by 17.1

<sup>b</sup> To convert mg dl<sup>-1</sup> to  $\mu\text{mol l}^{-1}$  multiply by 88.4

<sup>c</sup> Values are with respiratory support

<sup>d</sup> Adrenergic agents administered for 1 h or longer (doses as  $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1} \text{min}^{-1}$ )

vious health status, later onset of acute renal failure, sepsis, oliguria and severity of illness [79]. The use of low-dose dopamine has been shown to be ineffective in halting the progression to acute renal failure in the critically ill [80, 81]. Daily intermittent haemodialysis is better than alternate-day haemofiltration in critically ill patients who require renal replacement therapy, improving the time to resolution and survival at 14 days [82]. Continuous renal replacement therapy has equivalent outcomes to intermittent renal replacement therapy for acute renal failure in critical illness, although the former may offer easier management of fluid balance in the haemodynamically unstable septic patient. Whether higher doses (i.e. ultrafiltration rates 35–45 vs. 20 ml kg<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) of continuous renal replacement therapy confer a survival advantage in acute renal failure awaits corroboration [83].

#### Metabolic management

Impaired adrenoceptor responsiveness has long been recognised in endotoxic shock, partially reversible by corticosteroids [84, 85]. However, high doses of steroids (methylprednisolone 30 mg/kg or dexamethasone), administered on day 1 of septic shock failed to show an outcome benefit in two multicentre randomised controlled trial in the 1980s, with the abandonment of empirical steroid treatment, except for those with demonstrable adrenocortical insufficiency [86, 87, 88]. However, later work employing the prospective characterisation of the adrenal status of patients in septic shock, through the use of a 250 µg ACTH stimulation test, into so-called responders (proposed unimpaired adrenocortical axis) and non-responders (proposed relative adrenocortical insufficiency) proved more encouraging. Thus non-responders randomised to 50 mg hydrocortisone every 6 h plus 50 µg oral fludrocortisone for 7 days displayed a significantly

better 28-day vasopressor-withdrawal effect and survival advantage than those receiving placebo [89]. Overall survival between the hydrocortisone and placebo groups was not statistically different [90]. An ongoing trial (EUROCORTICUS) aims to address previous findings and investigate the risk-benefit ratio of low-dose steroids in non-refractory septic shock.

Glycaemic control, whilst avoiding potentially deleterious episodes of hypoglycaemia, plays an important role in outcomes of sepsis-associated organ failures and mortality. Tight glucose control (4.4–6.1 mmol/l) compared with standard care confers significant survival advantage in post-operative cardiac surgery patients. Multiple-organ failure with a proven focus of sepsis was also decreased [91]. Recent studies further support tight but less stringent control of blood glucose in critically ill patients (8.0 mmol/l or less) but suggest that glucose control, rather than insulin dose per se, is more important in determining outcome [92].

#### Anti-thrombotic strategies

The inflammatory response in severe sepsis is integrally related to procoagulant activity and endothelial activation. Protein C is activated by complexing with thrombin and endothelial cell thrombomodulin. Activated protein C (APC) then modulates inflammation, coagulation and endothelial cell function. A deficiency of APC and lower levels of protein C activity in sepsis are correlated with higher mortality rates [93, 94]. The PROWESS trial of drotrecogin alfa (activated) (recombinant human APC, rhAPC) showed that patients with severe sepsis who were randomised to 96-h infusions of rhAPC (24 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) within 24 h of inclusion had significantly lower 28-day all-cause mortality vs. placebo (24.7% vs. 30.8% respectively). The incidence of serious bleeding was higher in the

**Table 3** Management guidelines for ‘early’ (the initial few hours following suspected sepsis) and ‘late’ (the period beyond the first few hours of severe sepsis) severe sepsis and septic shock (*ALI* acute lung injury, *ARDS* acute respiratory distress syndrome, *APACHE* Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation, *MODS* multiple organ dysfunction syndrome) (adapted from [38])

Early sepsis
Investigations
Diagnosis
Elevated serum lactate
Microbiological cultures before anti-microbial therapy is initiated
Two or more blood cultures (percutaneously and vascular access)
Therapy
Initial resuscitation
Begin resuscitation immediately in patients with hypotension
Early goals
Central venous pressure: 8–12 mmHg
Mean arterial blood pressure: $\geq 65$ mmHg and $< 90$ mmHg
Urine output: $\geq 0.5$ ml kg $^{-1}$ h
Central venous oxygen saturation or mixed venous saturation: $\geq 70\%$
During the first 6 h if goals not achieved with CVP of 8–12 mmHg
Transfuse packed red blood cells to hmt $\geq 30\%$ , and/or
Dobutamine infusion to achieve goals
Antibiotic therapy
Intravenous antibiotic therapy <i>within the first hour</i> of recognition of severe sepsis, <i>after</i> appropriate cultures
Consider local microbiology susceptibility patterns in guiding treatment regimens
Reassess anti-microbial regimens after 48–72 h aiming to de-escalate empirical broad spectrum regimens, at the earliest opportunity
Source control measures
As soon as possible
Consider measures that are definitive but minimise physiological disturbance, e.g. percutaneous vs. surgical drainage of an abscess
Low threshold for suspecting and replacing intravascular access devices promptly
Late sepsis <sup>a</sup>
Investigations
Antibiotic therapy: as for early sepsis
Source control: as for early sepsis
Therapy
Fluid therapy
Crystalloid or colloid
Fluid challenges based on response and tolerance
Vasopressors
When an appropriate fluid challenge fails to restore adequate mean arterial pressure and organ perfusion
Vasopressor therapy may also be required transiently to sustain life and maintain perfusion
Norepinephrine (or dopamine)
Inotropic support
If a low CO persists despite adequate initial resuscitation
Dobutamine, epinephrine or dopamine will all increase CO. If used in the presence of low mean arterial pressure, consider combination with a vasopressor
Steroids
Intravenous corticosteroids: hydrocortisone 200–300 mg/day, for 7 days in patients with fluid-resuscitated, vasopressor-dependent septic shock
Those with a positive response to an ACTH stimulation test can discontinue therapy
Recombinant human activated protein C
Consider in patients with APACHE II $\geq 25$ , sepsis-induced MODS, septic shock, or sepsis-induced ARDS and without contraindications
Blood transfusion
Red blood cell transfusion when haemoglobin decreases to 7.0 g/dl to achieve a target of 7.0–9.0 g/dl
Only when early resuscitation is complete, and in the absence of significant coronary artery disease, acute haemorrhage, or lactic acidosis
Mechanical ventilation of sepsis-induced ALI/ARDS
Avoid high tidal volumes coupled with high plateau pressures
Aim to reduce tidal volumes to $\sim 6$ ml.kg $^{-1}$ of lean body weight and end inspiratory plateau pressure $< 30$ cmH $_{2}$ O
Permissive hypercapnia allowable
Adjunctive strategies
Prone ARDS patients or utilise selective pulmonary vasodilators (i.e. Inhaled NO) for short term improvements in oxygenation, if requiring potentially injurious levels of FIO $_{2}$ or plateau pressure

<sup>a</sup> Management guidelines, once initial resuscitation/evaluation of the early sepsis strategies above have been fulfilled, but not mutually exclusive

**Table 3** (continued)

> 30° semi-recumbent position to prevent ventilator associated pneumonia, unless contraindicated
Weaning
Use a weaning protocol and daily spontaneous breathing trial to evaluate for ventilation discontinuation
Sedation, analgesia, and neuromuscular blockade in sepsis
Use sedation protocols. Use standardised sedation scores, and reiterate daily to the minimum necessary dose
If necessary, reiterate neuromuscular blockers daily and monitor the depth of blockade
Glucose control
Maintain blood glucose < 150 mg/dl (8.3 mmol) following initial stabilisation
Renal replacement
Continuous veno-venous haemofiltration is equivalent to intermittent veno-venous haemofiltration, but offers easier management in haemodynamically unstable septic patients
Deep vein thrombosis prophylaxis
Use low-dose unfractionated heparin, low molecular weight heparin
Stress ulcer prophylaxis
Histamine ( $H_2$ ) receptor blockers or alternatively proton pump inhibitors
Advanced care planning
Describe likely outcomes and realistic expectations

rhAPC group (3.5% vs. 2.0%,  $p = 0.06$ ) [95], and it seems that sicker patients (APACHE II > 25) benefit most from this therapy [96]. The effect was not reproduced in a large scale trial of anti-thrombin III in severe sepsis (mortality 38.9%, anti-thrombin group vs. 38.7% for placebo group) in spite of favourable indications from preclinical and phase II trials [97], in this sense mirroring experience with many other putative therapeutic interventions (i.e. anti-endotoxin, anti-TNF and nitric oxide synthase inhibition) trialled in patients with sepsis over many years [98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107]. This failure (PROWESS notwithstanding) of new pharmacological therapies and immunotherapies in patients with sepsis may in part reflect the complexity of mechanisms leading to organ dysfunction and the consequent heterogeneity of the patient population. Whether new definitions are needed that may identify critically ill patients more likely to respond to novel therapies remains unclear [106].

#### Other strategies

Blood transfusion requirements in the critically ill have evolved from reports of its beneficial use dating back to 1935 and the appreciation of its value in improving tissue DO<sub>2</sub> in early resuscitation [108]. However, the Transfusion in Critical Care Trial demonstrated that a conservative strategy employing a hemoglobin threshold of 7.0 g/dl (to maintain hemoglobin between 7 and 9 g/dl) is not associated with higher mortality than with a liberal transfusion protocol (i.e. threshold 10 g/dl), previously accepted as standard practice. However, only 6% of patients enrolled had sepsis, and in patients with ischaemic cardiac disease a higher threshold was recommended [109]. The optimal haemoglobin levels of specific groups of critically ill patients are therefore as yet unstudied, and the value of recombinant erythropoietin remains unclear.

Stress-ulcer prophylaxis to prevent clinically important bleeding from the gastrointestinal tract in critically ill patients is well established, and the predisposing factors (i.e. coagulopathy, hypotension and mechanical ventilation) are frequently present in patients with sepsis [110]. However, relatively small percentages of patients develop clinically important bleeding from recent observational studies. Moreover, the pursuit of early enteral nutrition where possible, together with a trend to an increased incidence of ventilator associated pneumonia by H<sub>2</sub> antagonists/proton pump inhibitors, means that identifying subgroups of patients who may benefit most from stress ulcer prophylaxis remains difficult.

#### Conclusions

Multiple organ dysfunction complicating sepsis remains the commonest cause of mortality in the ICU. However, its mechanisms remain unknown, and the results of pathological autopsy studies show no correlation with degree of organ dysfunction or with specific causes of death. Nevertheless, these mechanisms continue to be unravelled, alongside emerging genetic predisposing targets. Moreover, the concept of a variable immune status, which can be tracked during sepsis and modulated, provides an increasing number of potential new therapeutic targets. A body of evidence accrued over decades reemphasises the fundamental importance of early recognition of physiological surrogates of tissue dysoxia in reducing associated organ dysfunction. Local and International clinical strategies, through a phased approach of the development of evidenced-based guidelines (incorporating proven strategies in sepsis), their implementation and evaluation, have undertaken the challenge of effecting improved survival in this patient population.

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## Ventilator-induced lung injury: from the bench to the bedside

review are many of the most frequently cited studies (with the number of citations,  $N$ , from the Institute for Science Information Citation Index as of August 2005 included in parentheses), as well as those studies which the authors feel have had a particularly significant impact on subsequent research and/or clinical practice.

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### Brief overview of the early years: air leaks, surfactant dysfunction, and “respirator lung”

As early as the 1700s investigators raised concerns that inflation of the lung with positive pressure ventilation could potentially damage the lungs and produce air leaks (for an excellent historical review see [1]). In 1887 Champneys [2] reported that lung rupture and cervical emphysema ensue if the lungs of dead infants are subjected to pressures of 20–80 mmHg. In 1939 Macklin [3] (Number of citations,  $N=467$ ) published a frequently cited study demonstrating that excessive alveolar distension produces rupture at the junction of the alveolar wall and vascular sheath, allowing air to track along the bronchovascular sheath into the mediastinum and subcutaneous tissues or to rupture into the pleural or peritoneal spaces. Given that the development of air leaks appeared to be related to the use of high airway pressures, the term “barotrauma” was applied.

In addition to air leaks, laboratory investigations also demonstrated that mechanical ventilation can adversely affect lung compliance and surfactant function. Greenfield et al. [4] ( $N=115$ ) showed that ventilation of dog lungs with large tidal volume ( $V_t$ ; generated with a peak inspiratory pressure, PIP, of 36–32 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) for 2 h produces surfactant dysfunction, and Faridy et al. [5] ( $N=178$ ) observed in an ex vivo dog lung model that the addition of positive end expiratory pressure (PEEP) attenuates ventilation-induced increases in surface tension.

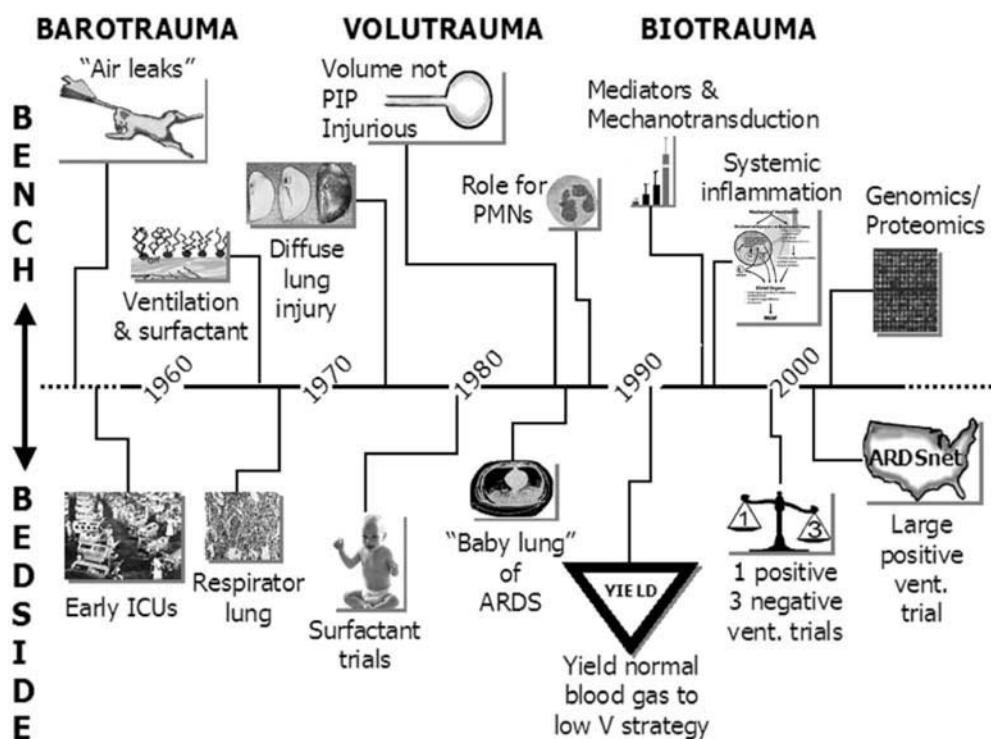
Early investigators also made a number of important observations. For example, in 1949 Fowler [6] ( $N=325$ )

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### Introduction

Once upon a time the existence of ventilator-induced lung injury (VILI) was debated. After all, most patients with lung dysfunction requiring mechanical ventilation had other potential causes of lung injury, and many patients appeared to tolerate mechanical ventilation for prolonged periods without any adverse sequelae. However, as a result of numerous studies over the past century, and especially during the past 20 years it is now generally accepted that mechanical ventilation *per se* can initiate as well as exacerbate lung injury and contribute to patient morbidity and mortality. This review examines the seminal bench and bedside studies that contributed to our current understanding of VILI, and that form the basis for current recommendations for mechanical ventilation of the critically ill. Figure 1 schematically depicts a timeline of bench to bedside research on VILI. Included in this

**Fig. 1** Time line illustrating a number of the seminal basic science (*top*) and clinical (*bottom*) observations that have influenced our understanding of ventilator-induced lung injury and have changed ventilatory support of critically ill patients over the years



published a key observation that would be revisited in later studies of VILI: the fact that ventilation in lungs is not uniform, particularly in the presence of underlying lung disease. Mead et al. [7] ( $N=584$ ) published an often cited paper examining the forces acting on alveoli within the lung. They illustrated that although uniform force proportional to the transalveolar pressure acts on adjacent alveoli in a uniformly expanded lung, the traction forces exerted by adjacent expanded alveoli on the walls of a collapsed alveolus can greatly exceed transpulmonary pressure (e.g., exceed  $140 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$ ) due to interdependence.

On the clinical front the use of mechanical ventilation as a supportive therapy outside the operating theater became increasingly widespread in the aftermath of the polio epidemics of the 1950s, and the term "respirator lung" started being applied to autopsy findings of diffuse alveolar damage (dense pulmonary cellular infiltrates, pulmonary edema, and hyaline membranes) in critically ill patients who had required ventilation with high airway pressures prior to death. Indeed, when Ashbaugh et al. [8] ( $N=1193$ ) submitted their landmark paper in 1967 on acute respiratory distress (ARDS) in adults, one reviewer purportedly dismissed this "new" syndrome as simply a manifestation of VILI [9].

Recognizing that it would be impossible in the clinical arena to dissect out the contribution of ventilator-induced injury from lung injury due to other causes, investigators turned to the bench.

### Seminal bench studies on ventilator-induced injury

The initial challenge tackled by investigators was determining whether mechanical ventilation per se could produce diffuse lung injury (i.e., "respirator lung"), and if so, what ventilatory parameters (e.g.,  $V_t$ , end-expiratory pressure) were responsible.

Can mechanical ventilation produce lung injury other than air leaks, and at what ventilatory settings?

A landmark paper examining this question was published by Webb and Tierney [10] ( $N=374$ ) in 1974 entitled "Experimental pulmonary-edema due to intermittent positive pressure ventilation with high inflation pressures. Protection by positive end-expiratory pressure." Realizing that "some patients with ARDS may require pressures of  $40-80 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$ ," Webb and Tierney set out to determine whether the "only complications of these pressures involve lung rupture with interstitial emphysema or pneumothorax." Their study design consisted of ventilating rats with normal lungs with PIP values of 14, 30, or  $45 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$  without PEEP, as well as with PIP of 30 or  $45 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$  and  $10 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$  of PEEP. In order to maintain similar  $\text{PaCO}_2$  with the various ventilation strategies the dead space of the ventilatory circuit was altered.

This seminal study had several key findings. First, in keeping with prior studies, Webb and Tierney demonstrated that ventilation of normal lungs with low pressures

(PIP 14 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) does not cause significant injury. Second, they dramatically showed that ventilation with high pressures (30 or 45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) produces perivascular edema, and that ventilation at high airway pressures (45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) without PEEP leads to severe lung injury (gross pulmonary edema, severe hypoxia) as well as death within 35 min. Third, they showed that PEEP confers protection from alveolar edema due to high inspiratory pressure ventilation.

Based on the results of this study, Webb and Tierney put forth a number of precepts that future research would validate: (a) that lungs from patients with ARDS have some “normal alveoli scattered among collapsed or fluid-filled alveoli, and that although the flooded alveoli “may be protected from over inflation... we are concerned that the normal alveoli may be over inflated and damaged,” (b) that “tissue disruption secondary to a high inspiratory pressure is probably not the mechanism of the changes we observed,” and (c) that surfactant dysfunction with certain ventilatory strategies likely contributed to the development of lung injury. Prophetically, they concluded with the comment that the results “have influenced our management of patients requiring ventilatory assistance. We avoid the use of high inspiratory pressure positive pressure breathing, especially if the end-expiratory volume is low, as for example in patients with ARDS...” and “in such situations we strive to avoid high inspiratory pressures, use a low frequency, and apply PEEP” (quite similar to current recommendations decades later).

However, the study by Webb and Tierney (and other animal studies to follow) had a number of significant limitations. As would subsequently become even more apparent, different species have different susceptibility to VILI (i.e., small species are generally more susceptible). Therefore it remained uncertain whether the bench findings were applicable to humans. Second, the period of ventilation in this study was only approx. 60 min (N.B. short periods of ventilation are a limitation of most bench studies). As such, it remained unclear whether the results were applicable to the lung injury found with longer periods of ventilation. Third, hemodynamic parameters were not measured or controlled between groups and lung volumes (e.g.,  $V_t$ , end-inspiratory volume) were not measured. Thus it remained unclear whether other factors (e.g., hypotensive shock) may have contributed to the lung injury. Finally, the study did not dissect out the mechanisms responsible for high inspiratory pressure VILI.

#### What ventilatory parameters are injurious and how?

In a series of eloquently designed experiments Dreyfuss and colleagues [11, 12, 13] explored which of the many parameters of mechanical ventilation (e.g.,  $V_t$ , PIP, end expiratory lung volume) is responsible for the develop-

ment of pulmonary edema, and whether the physiological changes seen with injurious ventilation are associated with any ultrastructural changes (as assessed by electron microscopy). In their 1985 paper Dreyfuss et al. [11] demonstrated that high pressure (PIP 45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) ventilation of rat lungs *in vivo* increases extravascular water and lung albumin uptake rapidly (within 5 min of ventilation), and that with longer periods of ventilation (up to 20 min) a progressive increase in lung injury occurs (i.e., endothelial cell detachment and blebs progressing to diffuse injury including denudation of the epithelial basement membrane, interstitial and alveolar edema with hyaline membranes and cell debris) [11] ( $N=364$ ). This study illustrated that injurious ventilation of normal lungs could not only produce ultrastructural cellular damage, but that this injury occurs within *minutes* of initiating an injurious ventilation strategy.

Dreyfuss et al. [12] ( $N=503$ ) also explored whether it was the high airway pressure *per se* or the resulting lung volume that leads to VILI and pulmonary edema. In order to differentiate the effect of airway pressure from that of lung volume rats were subjected to one of the following five ventilatory strategies: (a) low PIP (7 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) resulting in relatively low  $V_t$  (13 ml/kg); (b) high PIP (45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) resulting in high  $V_t$  (40 ml/kg); (c) high PIP (45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) and 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP ( $V_t$  25 ml/kg); (d) high PIP (45 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) but restricted  $V_t$  (19 ml/kg, produced by using a thoracoabdominal binder to limit chest wall excursion); and (e) negative inspiratory pressure (using a mini-iron lung) and high  $V_t$  (44 ml/kg). The key finding of this study was that high  $V_t$  ventilation, irrespective of airway pressure, produces severe lung injury characterized by pulmonary edema, increased alveolar-capillary permeability, and structural abnormalities. In contrast, ventilation with lower  $V_t$ , irrespective of airway pressure, does not produce ultrastructural changes or signs of alveolar edema or hemorrhage. In addition, PEEP once again was found to be “protective,” as the presence of PEEP prevented pulmonary epithelial damage and alveolar edema and significantly reduced interstitial edema and endothelial cell changes. As a result of this study (and several confirmatory studies in other models, see [13]), researchers began to focus in on “volutrauma” (i.e., injury due to lung volume which is proportional to the transmural pressure gradient across the alveolus) rather than “barotrauma” (injury due to airway pressure) as the predominant injurious ventilatory parameter. These results agreed with Bouhuys’ [14] observation in *Nature* in 1969 that musicians playing the trumpet repetitively develop pressures at the airway opening of approx. 150 cmH<sub>2</sub>O without developing lung injury. Further laboratory studies showed that ventilation with either high  $V_t$  or high end-inspiratory lung volume is detrimental [13].

Meanwhile, other investigators such as West et al. [15] and Parker et al. [16, 17] focused on the injurious forces acting on the opposite side of the thin (<0.4  $\mu$ m) alveolar

capillary interface, i.e., the endothelial surface. Using isolated perfused rabbit lungs, West et al. [15] ( $N=230$ ) examined the role of three of the major forces acting on the pulmonary capillary wall (circumferential tension due to transmural pressure, surface tension of the alveolus, and longitudinal tension due to lung inflation) and demonstrated that at high lung volume or with high perfusion pressure, capillary stress failure greatly increases.

Multiple investigators also explored the relationship between PEEP and VILI (including what level of PEEP is associated with reduced alveolar edema, surfactant dysfunction, histological injury, and improved gas exchange). Studies showed that in experimental models in which excessive lung distension could occur with high PEEP (e.g., open chest models or ex vivo lungs), high PEEP worsened lung edema. However, with in vivo models in which lung volume was restricted by the chest wall, high PEEP resulted in cardiovascular compromise and was associated with either increased or decreased pulmonary edema. The particular level of PEEP that was injurious appeared to depend on a number of factors including the experimental model, animal species, and end-inspiratory lung volume (with similar PEEP leading to more adverse sequelae in ex vivo models, smaller species or with large lung volumes) [13].

Conversely, ventilation without PEEP did not appear to cause significant injury, provided low airway pressure/physiological  $V_t$  was used in normal lungs in vivo (i.e., with intact negative pleural pressure to maintain end-expiratory lung volume) for short periods of time. However, ventilation with low PEEP or no PEEP in ex vivo lungs, or lungs with surfactant dysfunction (such as occurs with high  $V_t$  ventilation) was associated with lung injury and dysfunction. For example, in an ex vivo rat lung model Muscedere et al. [18] ( $N=332$ ) illustrated that ventilation using PEEP below the inflection point of the pressure-volume curve resulted in significant distal airway injury and reduced lung compliance as compared to the minimal injury found if PEEP greater than the inflection point was used. These studies led to a new concept in VILI—"atelectrauma" (injury from repetitive opening and collapse of distal lung units due to insufficient end-expiratory lung volume) [19] ( $N=46$ ).

#### Factors that predispose to ventilator-induced lung injury

Multiple bench studies have also identified a number of factors (such as underlying lung disease, systemic inflammation, surfactant dysfunction, aspiration, pulmonary edema, extremes of age, heterogeneous lung ventilation) that increase the susceptibility of lungs to injury by mechanical ventilation. Often a synergistic interaction was found between mechanical ventilation and a preexisting lung abnormality. For example, in isolated perfused rabbit lungs Hernandez et al. [20] ( $N=63$ ) demonstrated that,

individually, oleic acid or ventilation with PIP of 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O has negligible effects on lung capillary filtration coefficients. However, when the insults are combined, severe lung injury (pulmonary edema, hyaline membranes, and extensive alveolar hemorrhage) ensue. Similarly, they found that age or surfactant inactivation predisposes to increased injury with subsequent mechanical ventilation [21, 22], and Dreyfuss et al. [23] ( $N=93$ ) demonstrated a synergistic interaction between high volume ventilation ( $V_t$  45 ml/kg) and pretreatment of rats with  $\alpha$ -naphthylthiourea (a drug that increases alveolar capillary permeability and edema). Of the various factors studied particular attention was paid to surfactant dysfunction, given its prevalence in both neonatal respiratory distress and in adult lung disorders such as aspiration and lung sepsis (for review see [24]).

Several explanations have been put forth as to why such preexisting lung abnormalities increase the susceptibility to mechanical VILI. First, for structural disruption to occur the magnitude of force applied must exceed the resilience of the underlying lung parenchyma. Thus it follows that factors that either increase the forces applied to regions of the lung (e.g., surfactant dysfunction, heterogeneous ventilation due to atelectasis and flooded alveoli, repetitive opening and collapse of alveoli) or weaken lung tissue (such as age, inflammation) predispose to injury. In addition, factors that prime the inflammatory response or inhibit tissue healing also increase the lung's susceptibility to VILI [25], as does genetic predisposition. It is thought that the interaction of mechanical ventilation with other coexisting lung abnormalities is one explanation as to why identical ventilation settings produce VILI in some individuals but not all.

#### Is the mechanism of ventilator-induced injury due solely to physical disruption due to excessive force?

Most of the investigations cited above suggest physical disruption of the lung (e.g., capillary stress failure by alveolar overdistension) as one mechanism whereby mechanical ventilation produces lung injury. However, evidence of a potentially important role for ventilator-induced molecular and cell-mediated events in the pathogenesis of ventilator-induced injury soon began to emerge.

In 1983 Hamilton et al. [26] ( $N=263$ ) published a study showing a benefit of high-frequency oscillation (i.e., using 15 Hz,  $V_t$  1.5 ml/kg; mean airway pressure 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) compared to "conventional" ventilation (using PIP 25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O; PEEP 6 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) in surfactant depleted rabbits. In this study the authors found significantly better lung function with fewer signs of histological lung injury in the high-frequency oscillation study group than in the conventional ventilation group. On further analysis, however, the investigators noted the presence of granu-

locyte infiltration in the alveoli and interstitium of the rabbits in the conventional ventilation group. To determine whether the granulocytes had a significant role in producing ventilation related lung injury Kawano et al. [27] ( $N=126$ ) repeated the study using both neutrophil-depleted rabbits and neutrophil-depleted rabbits in which the granulocytes were reintroduced. They found that in contrast to rabbits with neutrophils, the neutrophil-depleted rabbits did not develop significant lung injury (changes in oxygenation, vascular permeability, hyaline membranes or granulocyte infiltration) with conventional ventilation. However, when neutrophils were reinfused into the neutrophil depleted rabbits, lung dysfunction ensued. Thus lung injury due to surfactant dysfunction/VILI in this model was not due simply to structural disruption but was mediated in large part by granulocytes.

Other investigators have observed that ventilation of lungs can increase levels of inflammatory mediators within the lungs, and that treatment with blockers of inflammatory mediators can reduce ventilator associated lung injury. For example, Tremblay et al. [28] ( $N=364$ ) found increased bronchoalveolar lavage levels of several inflammatory mediators—including tumor necrosis factor (TNF)  $\alpha$ , interleukin (IL) 6, and IL10—in ex vivo rat lungs subjected to injurious ventilation strategies. The same investigators in another report [29] ( $N=75$ ) coined the term “biotrauma” to encompass this new field of investigation of molecular and cell mediated mechanisms of VILI. Supportive of this hypothesis, investigators such as Narimanbekov and Rozycki [30] ( $N=52$ ) demonstrated that use of cytokine modulators can reduced lung dysfunction following mechanical ventilation. Administration of an IL-1 receptor antagonist prior to initiation of the injurious ventilation strategy in surfactant depleted rabbits reduced the severity of lung injury (bronchoalveolar lavage levels of polymorphonuclear cells, elastase, and albumin) produced by hyperoxia and 8 h of ventilation with 24 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PIP. Of note, in this study the use of IL-1 receptor antagonist (RA) did not significantly improve either lung compliance or oxygenation. Other investigators, however, have demonstrated reduced ventilator associated lung injury as well as reduced ventilator-associated systemic abnormalities (such as increased gut permeability) using mediators such as anti-TNF or transgenic mice strains (for a concise summary of these studies see [31]).

Numerous subsequent studies have revealed species and model-specific differences with regards to levels of multiple mediators (including cytokines, receptors, ion channels, proteases, and extracellular components such as collagen/laminin) as well as a role for various cell types in addition to neutrophils in mediating the ventilator associated inflammatory response (e.g., type II pneumocytes, macrophages). Studies have also suggested that mechanotransduction (the conversion of externally applied forces on cells into activation of various cell signaling pathways

and alterations in gene expression or cell structure) plays a role in VILI, and multiple stretch-activated signal transduction pathways (e.g., mitogen-activated protein kinases, stretch-sensitive ion channels, integrin receptors) have been identified. In a seminal study using an isolated perfused rat lung model Parker et al. [16] ( $N=51$ ) abrogated the increase in microvascular permeability due to high PIP ventilation (20 and 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) with gadolinium (an inhibitor of endothelial stretch-activated cation channels). In a subsequent study Parker et al. [17] demonstrated in the same model that inhibition of phosphotyrosine kinase increases the susceptibility of the lungs to high PIP injury; in contrast, inhibition of tyrosine kinase attenuates lung injury. The results of these studies lent further support to the contention that ventilation-induced changes in microvascular permeability is actively modulated by a molecular response to ventilation rather than simply a result of passive structural failure of the alveolar capillary membrane.

Not surprisingly, significant debate has ensued and continues as to the relative contribution of physical disruption vs. biotrauma in the pathogenesis of ventilator-induced injury [32, 33].

### Is ventilator-induced injury limited to the lung?

Early investigators appreciated that in addition to lung injury, mechanical ventilation can also have adverse systemic sequelae including death from tension pneumothorax, or hypotension and impaired renal function secondary to high PEEP. In recent years experimental evidence has emerged that mechanical ventilation may also produce numerous other systemic sequelae. For example, Kolobow et al. [34] ( $N=378$ ) compared the effect in sheep of ventilation with prolonged high  $V_t$  (50–70 ml/kg, PIP 50 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) to that with low  $V_t$  (10 ml/kg, PIP 15–20 cmH<sub>2</sub>O). Interestingly, they found that all sheep subjected to the high  $V_t$  strategy died with multiple organ system dysfunction within 48 h.

In 1998 we hypothesized that biotrauma and the translocation of mediators can lead to the development of multisystem organ dysfunction [35] ( $N=185$ ). Supportive of this hypothesis, several investigators have demonstrated that the increased alveolar capillary membrane permeability observed with high  $V_t$  ventilation allows translocation of various alveolar inflammatory mediators or bacteria into the systemic circulation. For example, using in an isolated perfused lung model von Bethmann et al. [36] ( $N=122$ ) showed that high  $V_t$  ventilation produces increased levels of TNF $\alpha$  and IL6 in the perfusate; and in an acid aspiration rat model Chiumello et al. observed increased serum TNF-a levels in the group ventilated with zero PEEP and high  $V_t$  [37] ( $N=130$ ). Similarly, using an in vivo dog model Nahum et al. [38] ( $N=85$ ) demonstrated translocation of *Escherichia coli* from the lungs into the

bloodstream of most dogs ventilated with high  $V_t$  and low PEEP (transpulmonary pressure of 35, equivalent to 76 ml/kg, 3 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP). In contrast, bacterial translocation was only found in one of six dogs ventilated at the same end-inspiratory pressure (35 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) and 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP, and in none of the dogs ventilated with  $V_t$  15 ml/kg and 3 cmH<sub>2</sub>O PEEP. Subsequent studies have provided further evidence of ventilation-induced “spillover” of a number of other intra-alveolar pathogens (e.g., *Klebsiella* [39], LPS [40]) and inflammatory mediators into the circulation. In addition, recent studies have shown that ventilatory strategy can also have a wide range of effects on remote organs, including increased ileal permeability [41], increased renal and small intestine apoptosis [42], changes in the peripheral immune response and host susceptibility to infection, and the development of systemic capillary leak [32, 43].

#### Strengths and weakness of the bench studies

As alluded to above, bench studies have a number of limitations that prevent direct extrapolation to the clinical arena. Although *in vitro* and *ex vivo* models are indispensable for addressing questions regarding the effect of cell stretch or ventilation on particular cells or signal transduction pathways in the absence of confounding systemic sequelae (such as hypotension due to high mean pleural pressure), the findings from such models may not be representative of the events occurring *in vivo*. In addition, although animal models may minimize differences between study participants, there are genetic and species-specific susceptibilities and responses to certain stimuli which may or may not be representative of the human response. Furthermore, with few exceptions the majority of laboratory studies of VILI to date have involved only brief periods of ventilation (hours) and used fairly extreme ventilatory settings to produce injury, leading some to question the clinical relevance of such studies.

#### **Seminal bedside studies on ventilation-induced lung injury**

From a clinician’s perspective the key question is whether VILI contributes to patient morbidity and mortality, and if so, how can it be avoided. Although underlying lung injury is known to be a confounding factor present in many patients on ventilatory support, the laboratory studies have suggested that, if anything, this places the patients at increased risk of VILI as: (a) these patients often require higher pressure/volume to oxygenate/ventilate, and (b) many of these patients have factors known to increase susceptibility to VILI (such as surfactant dysfunction, malnutrition, endotoxemia).

In a series of publications Gattinoni et al. used computed tomography to demonstrate the effect of different ventilation strategies on the lungs of patients with acute lung injury (ALI). In a highly cited study Gattinoni et al. [44] ( $N=318$ ) examined the effect of ventilation with different levels of PEEP (5, 10, and 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) on lung compliance, lung volumes (as measured by helium dilution), and the computed tomographic appearance of the lungs in 20 patients with ALI. The key finding of this study was the visual evidence that lung inflation in ALI is extremely heterogeneous, with dependent regions being flooded or atelectatic, and often only a low volume of aerated nondependent lung. In addition, ventilation in these patients with ALI appears to be distributed principally to this low volume of aerated nondependent lung with relatively normal compliance (which the authors termed “baby lung,” due to its low volume) [44, 45]. These computed tomography studies also suggested that the pressure-volume curve of the patients is representative of only the healthy aerated zones of the lung, and that optimal lung recruitment (i.e., opening up of lung units without significant overdistension) coincides with the PEEP at which optimal lung compliance was measured. Thus, in keeping with the speculations of Webb and Tierney [10] and others decades earlier, the studies by Gattinoni et al. demonstrated how mechanical ventilation of heterogeneously injured lungs with even relatively low  $V_t$  can produce significant regional overdistension. For example, in a lung with only 25% of alveoli ventilated, a ventilator set to deliver a  $V_t$  of 10 ml/kg would actually deliver approx. 40 ml/kg to the patient’s “baby lungs”—a volume associated with significant lung injury in laboratory studies.

Based on the above, and mounting experimental evidence of potential adverse sequelae of mechanical ventilation with greater than physiological volumes, clinical investigators began to question whether mechanical ventilation using “conventional”  $V_t$  of 10–15 ml/kg to maintain normal arterial oxygenation and ventilation is necessary or harmful, particularly in patients with ARDS and “baby” lungs. After all, in patients with status asthmaticus a ventilatory approach that uses lower peak pressures and allows higher PaCO<sub>2</sub>, a technique termed “controlled hypoventilation,” appeared to be well tolerated and associated with improved outcomes [46, 47].

In 1990 Hickling et al. [48] ( $N=368$ ) published a landmark study showing that the use of a “protective” ventilation strategy that limits PIP (<40 or <30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O if possible, corresponding to  $V_t$  of 4–7 ml/kg) and allowed hypercapnia and a slight deterioration in oxygenation, appeared to reduce mortality by 60% in 70 patients with severe ARDS compared to mortality predicted by Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation II score (i.e., 16% vs. 40%). This seminal study suggested a promising new approach for ventilation in ARDS. A major weakness of the study, however, was the absence of a concurrent

control group. In addition, the study was only a retrospective case series from a single institution, which despite showing an apparent survival advantage did not observe a difference in either gas exchange or signs of lung injury between survivors and nonsurvivors. These weaknesses, however, do not diminish the importance of this study which helped to change the prevailing philosophy at the time that normal arterial blood gases should be a major goal of ventilatory support.

To circumvent the inherent limitations of retrospective and nonrandomized trials, prospective randomized trials examined whether a ventilation strategy with lower vs. higher lung volume improves patient outcome. In 1995 Amato et al. [49] ( $N=238$ ) published a positive trial that further fueled debate. In this study 28 patients with ARDS were randomized to either a low  $V_t$ /high PEEP strategy ( $V_t < 6 \text{ ml/kg}$ ,  $\text{PIP} < 40 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$ , permissive hypercapnia, PEEP 15–20  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$ , and a goal of a plateau pressure,  $P_{\text{plat}} < 30 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$ ) or a high  $V_t$  strategy ( $V_t 12 \text{ ml/kg}$ , PEEP 6–8  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$ ,  $P_{\text{plat}}$  of approx. 46  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$ ). The low  $V_t$  strategy was associated with improved survival (40% relative reduction in mortality at 28 days). The benefits of the low  $V_t$ /high PEEP strategy were confirmed by extending the study to 53 patients at which point the study was stopped because an interim analysis revealed a significant survival difference (28-day mortality of 38% with the low volume/high PEEP strategy vs. 71% with the high  $V_t$  strategy;  $p < 0.001$ ) [50] ( $N=678$ ). In addition to a survival advantage, at 28 days more patients in the “protective” ventilation strategy arm had been weaned from ventilation (66% vs. 29%), and there was a lower incidence of barotrauma (7% vs. 42%). However, the Amato et al. study was criticized for having higher than predicted mortality in the control group. Furthermore, three other small prospective randomized trials failed to find a survival advantage of low vs. high  $V_t$  ventilation strategy [51, 52, 53] ( $N=258$ , 182, 102, respectively). These smaller negative trials, however, were criticized for having only a small difference in  $V_t$  between study groups, insufficient statistical power to detect a difference, the presence of uncorrected acidosis in the low volume arms, as well as the fact that the conventional ventilation arms in all the negative trials had a  $P_{\text{plat}}$  less than 32  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  (i.e., had relatively low end-inspiratory lung volumes more in keeping with ventilatory strategies found to be noninjurious in laboratory studies).

To overcome the limitations of these small studies the National Institutes of Health (NIH) sponsored a consortium (ARDSNet) to carry out a large multicenter prospective randomized trial in which patients with ALI or ARDS were randomized to either: (a) “traditional”  $V_t$  of 12  $\text{ml/kg}$  predicted body weight (using a formula based on gender and height rather than actual weight) and a  $P_{\text{plat}}$  of 50  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  or lower, or (b)  $V_t$  of 6  $\text{ml/kg}$  predicted body weight and a  $P_{\text{plat}}$  of 30  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  or lower [54] ( $N=1027$ ). Although the study was conceived with a pa-

tient population of approx. 1000, the trial was stopped early after an interim analysis revealed a 22% relative survival advantage with the low  $V_t$  strategy ( $n=861$ ; mortality of 31% vs. 39.8%). In addition to improved survival, patients in the low  $V_t$  strategy were also found to have more days free of ventilatory support during the 28 days following randomization (12±11 vs. 10±11). Of note, the mean  $P_{\text{plat}}$ s of the low and high  $V_t$  strategy were 25±6 vs. 33±8  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  respectively (a greater difference between groups than that of the small, negative trials). Furthermore, in keeping with the animal studies suggesting that ventilation affect systemic inflammation, the low  $V_t$  strategy also resulted in lower plasma IL-6 levels (on day 3) as well as fewer nonpulmonary organ failures (circulatory, renal, coagulation).

Subsequent reports, however, have brought to light a number of caveats regarding the ARDSNet study. First, some have argued that the study demonstrated the increased mortality of a high  $V_t$  strategy resulting in a high  $P_{\text{plat}}$  (33  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$ ) rather than a survival advantage to using  $V_t$  of 6  $\text{ml/kg}$ . Of note, the  $P_{\text{plat}}$  in all of the smaller negative studies was less than 32  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$  in both study groups (i.e., control and less injurious ventilation strategy groups). Second, it has been argued that those in the low  $V_t$  group may have developed higher auto-PEEP than those in the conventional ventilation group due to the high respiratory rates used [55]. As such, the survival advantage may have been due to higher PEEP rather than low  $V_t$  and/or end-inspiratory lung volume (although the results of a more recent trial argue against this [56]). Third, the study population was restricted to patients with ALI or ARDS and the exclusion criteria included patients with severe chronic respiratory disease, morbid obesity, burns, a contraindication to hypercapnia or hypoxia (such as increased intracranial pressure or sickle cell disease) or a predicted 6 month mortality of more than 50%. Thus the study findings cannot be directly extrapolated to the excluded patient populations or to patients with less injured or normal lungs. Fourth, the low  $V_t$  group developed hypercapnia and received bicarbonate to treat acidosis (note: bicarbonate was not used in the smaller negative trials). Thus it is unclear to what extent bicarbonate contributed to the survival difference. Fifth, the higher number of ventilator-free days was due to reduced mortality (i.e., no significant difference was found in ventilator-free days among survivors between the two groups). Nevertheless, despite these limitations this study was the only large interventional study in decades in ARDS patients to show a significant reduction in mortality, and certainly was in keeping with the plethora of laboratory studies showing that high volume lung ventilation strategies are deleterious. Thus this study provided a new “gold standard” ventilation strategy for patients with ARDS or ALI.

Another seminal study in patients that also supported the experimental evidence that ventilation strategy can

have systemic effects on the host inflammatory response was published by Ranieri and colleagues [57] ( $N=360$ ) in 1999. This study, entitled the “Effect of mechanical ventilation on inflammatory mediators in patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome—a randomized controlled trial,” examined whether a lung protective ventilation strategy in patients with ARDS reduces their pulmonary and systemic inflammatory cytokine response. Fifty-one ARDS patients who had been ventilated for less than 8 h were randomized to either “control” ventilation ( $V_t$  11 ml/kg to produce normal  $\text{PaCO}_2$ ) and PEEP (6 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) producing best improvement in  $\text{PaO}_2$  without worsening hemodynamics;  $P_{\text{plat}}$  31 cmH<sub>2</sub>O) or  $V_t$  and PEEP based on the pressure-volume curve ( $V_t$  7 ml/kg, PEEP 15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O,  $P_{\text{plat}}$  25 cmH<sub>2</sub>O). In the 44 patients who completed the study the concentration of inflammatory mediators 36 h after randomization was found to rise significantly in the control group (i.e., bronchoalveolar lavage levels of IL-1 $\beta$  and IL-6 and as well as bronchoalveolar lavage and plasma levels of TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-6, TNF- $\alpha$  receptors, and IL-1 RA) whereas in patients in the lung-protective strategy group a reduction in bronchoalveolar lavage concentrations of polymorphonuclear cells, IL-1 $\beta$ , TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-8, IL-6, TNF- $\alpha$  receptors, IL-1 RA, and in plasma concentration of IL-6, IL-1 RA, and a TNF- $\alpha$  receptor was found. Of note, this study was not designed to address whether these changes in inflammatory mediators resulted in improved survival or long-term outcomes (i.e., the ventilation protocols were only set for 36–40 h post inclusion, and organ failure and mortality were not primary outcomes). However, a post-hoc analysis revealed more ventilator-free days (over 28 days) in the lung protective group, and a number of subsequent clinical studies have also demonstrated ventilation strategy dependent changes in systemic inflammatory mediators (including the previously discussed NIH trial [54, 58]). Of importance, although there appeared to be an association

between mediator levels and patient outcome in several studies, a cause and effect relationship has never been demonstrated.

Recently the NIH consortium published the results of yet another large trial comparing the effect of high vs. low PEEP on lung injury and survival in patients with ARDS. In this study 549 patients with ALI or ARDS were randomized to ventilation with  $V_t$  of 6 ml/kg,  $P_{\text{plat}}$  of less than 30 cmH<sub>2</sub>O, and PEEP of either 8.3±3.2 or 13.2±3.5 cmH<sub>2</sub>O [56]. The study was stopped early due to futility when an interim analysis revealed no significant differences in either mortality or ventilator-free days in the 28-day period following randomization. Thus, key clinical questions including how much PEEP is ideal, and what is the best way to determine optimal PEEP remain unanswered.

Similarly, to date most of the other promising interventions found to reduce lung injury and improve outcome in animal studies (e.g., prone positioning, surfactant supplementation, nitric oxide, lung recruitment maneuvers) have not been found significantly to improve patient survival or outcome in adult intensive care patients [59, 60, 61, 62]. As such, ongoing investigations at both the bench and bedside continue in the hopes of addressing the reasons for the discrepancies and better understanding the complex interactions of ventilation with the lung/whole organism.

In summary, the study of VILI over the past century exemplifies the “bench to bedside and back to the bench” research approach. This review discusses several of the seminal studies that led to our current understanding of VILI. Understanding these studies is helpful for interpreting and applying current guidelines for ventilation as well as appreciating the need for further studies at both the bench and the bedside to define the precise mechanisms of injury and develop novel approaches to further reduce or abrogate ventilator-induced injury.

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Martin J. Tobin

## Remembrance of weaning past: the seminal papers

**Abstract** The approach to ventilator weaning has changed considerably over the past 30 years. Change has resulted from research in three areas: pathophysiology, weaning-predictor testing, and weaning techniques. Physiology research illuminated the mechanisms of weaning failure. It also uncovered markers of weaning success. Through more reliable prediction, patients whose weaning would have been tedious in the 1970s are now weaned more rapidly. The weaning story offers several lessons in metascience: importance of creativity, the asking of heretical questions, serendipity, mental-set psychology,

cross-fertilization, and the hazards of precocity. Weaning research also illustrates how Kuhnian normal (me-too) science dominates any field. Making the next quantum leap in weaning will depend on spending less time on normal science and more on the raising (and testing) of maverick ideas.

**Keywords** Mechanical ventilation · Weaning · Pathophysiology · Control of breathing · Respiratory muscles · Diagnostic testing · Monitoring · Randomized clinical trials · Metascience · Serendipity · Cross-fertilization

In the world of ideas, *seminal* refers to a thought pregnant with consequences. In science, to a paper that fostered new research. When judging a paper as seminal, a distinction arises between scientific and humanistic literature [1]. Whereas humanistic writing can retain interest centuries later (permanence), scientific literature is cumulative: a new paper that provides a better solution to a problem supersedes older papers. Researchers are prone to regard the latest paper more influential – a phenomenon known as “supersEDURE.”

Is there a yardstick for rating a paper as seminal? Understandably, some use citation counts [2]. Scientometrists, however, have long recognized that authors often fail to cite the most ground-breaking work [3] and frequently cite papers of limited intellectual fiber or originality. Between 1961 and 1975, Watson and Crick’s paper on DNA [4] was cited at one-hundredth the frequency of Lowry’s report on a reagent for measuring protein [5]. The phenomenon of under-citation is known as “obliteration by

incorporation” [6]. I say all this to justify my own subjective selection of seminal papers on weaning.

In writing on weaning history, the goal and hazards are clear. A mere chronicle of facts would be banal. Instead, the goal is to understand how events unfolded. A historian of science should keep one eye focused on contingencies faced by researchers of the day, while turning the other to subsequent developments. But there’s the rub. It is impossible to capture accurately the minds of researchers who did not know what was going to happen next. Aware of the denouement, a historian is prone to exaggerate the rationality of those steps taken by researchers that were later proven correct. And to smugly list follies committed by other researchers.

My canvas contains only broad-brush strokes. Many contributions deserving pointillistic attention are omitted. At the end, I dilate on metascientific lessons offered by weaning research. That goal also influences my choice of seminal papers.

## Prologue

All discussion of modern ventilation dates to early-1950s Scandinavia [7]; Bjorn Ibsen's introduction of positive-pressure ventilation during the Copenhagen polio epidemic [8]; Carl-Gunnar Engström's first volume-oriented ventilator [9]; and Eric Nilsson's (1915–2004) management of barbiturate overdose [10]. Two Danes who earned their stripes bagging polio victims, Henrik Bendixen (1923–2004) and Henning Pontoppidan, later pioneered ventilator management in the United States [11]. After founding the first respiratory intensive care unit in the USA (at Massachusetts General Hospital) in 1961, they conducted much ventilator research [11].

In 1965, Bendixen, Pontoppidan and colleagues published the first textbook in the field, *Respiratory Care*. Its goal was to improve patient care “through the clinical application of the principles of respiratory physiology” [12]. At that time, the Boston unit was ventilating about 400 patients a year. Few were ventilated for longer than 2 days without a tracheotomy [13]: “It is our practice to limit endotracheal intubation to approximately forty-eight hours” [12]. The Bostonians articulated a principle that still holds: “To know the proper timing and rate of weaning from the respirator requires considerable judgment and experience. As a rule, weaning should start as soon as possible” [12].

Research over the ensuing 40 years can be divided into three areas: timing and prediction of weaning outcome, weaning techniques, and pathophysiology. To help readers see how findings in one area cross-fertilized research in other areas, I have broken discussion of each subfield into two phases.

## Predictor tests, phase I (1968–1983)

Weaning research begins with the development of diagnostic tests to identify the earliest time a patient might be safely disconnected from the ventilator. The first reports, from Pontoppidan's group (1968, 1972) [14, 15], are limited to abstracts. Thus, Sahn and Lakshminarayan's 1973 report [16] is the first detailed study. In 100 patients, they found that minute ventilation ( $< 10 \text{ l/min}$ ) and maximal inspiratory pressure ( $> 30 \text{ cmH}_2\text{O}$ ) “correlated well with the ability to discontinue mechanical ventilation.”

In 1983, Tahvanainen and colleagues [17] reported on 47 patients who had been weaned to an intermittent mandatory ventilation (IMV) rate of zero. Minute ventilation, maximal inspiratory pressure, vital capacity and dead space did not differentiate between patients who required reintubation and the rest.

The Tahvanainen paper represented a major advance. Unlike Sahn and Lakshminarayan, who did not express results as statistical quantities, they presented complete two-by-two tables (true positives, true negatives, false

positives, false negatives) for all variables. They, however, based conclusions about diagnostic-test reliability on chi-square comparisons of group means. Neither group used expressions such as sensitivity or specificity to judge a test's reliability.

## Weaning techniques, phase I (1965–1988)

The 1960s approach to weaning is given in Bendixen's book: “weaning is started by taking the patient off the respirator for three to four minutes every half hour and, if this is tolerated, by gradually increasing the period off the respirator as rapidly as is tolerated” [12]. In 1977, Egan advised: “When the patient can breathe unassisted around the clock, and is moving a reasonable amount of air without undue effort, and can walk for short distances consistent with his general physical condition, and when ventilation is satisfactory and stable by blood gas values, it is time to consider removal of the endotracheal tube” [18].

Compared with the preceding tedium, no imagination is needed to see how nurses and therapists regarded dialing an IMV rate as a major advance [19]. And by the mid-1980s, IMV was triumphant: being used for more than 90% of weaning attempts in the US [20]. Europe was little different. In 1988, Lemaire wrote: “Despite the lack of evidence that IMV shortens the weaning period, IMV is extensively used in the majority of ICUs” [21].

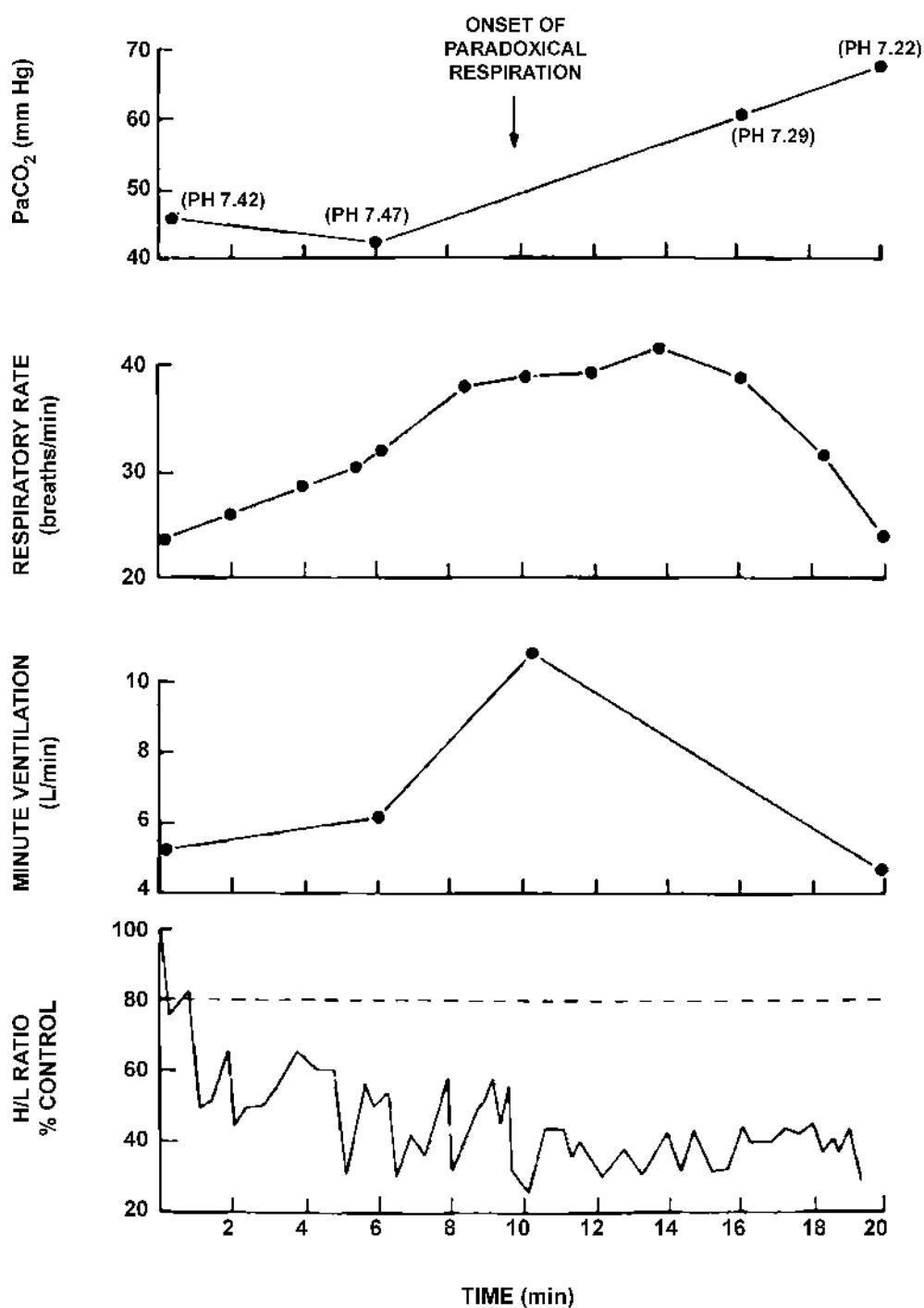
## Pathophysiology, phase I (1977–1989)

Throughout the 1970s, authors emphasized the challenge posed by difficult-to-wean patients. But attempts to elucidate underlying mechanisms were almost non-existent. An exception was a 1977 study by Henning, Shubin and Weil [22]. Using esophageal-balloon catheters, these investigators made detailed measurements of work of breathing. Ventilator-dependent patients had higher work readings. The mechanism, however, was not clear. In particular, dynamic pulmonary compliance was equivalent to that in weaning-success patients.

In 1982, Cohen, Roussos, Macklem and colleagues [23] reported electromyographic recordings in difficult-to-wean patients. Six patients developed power-spectral features of diaphragmatic fatigue. Electromyographic abnormalities were accompanied by abdominal paradox (inward motion during inspiration) and respiratory alternans (alternating predominance of rib-cage and abdominal breathing) (Fig. 1).

For the first time, there was a framework with which to investigate weaning pathophysiology. Attention turned from the lungs per se to the respiratory muscle pump. In 2006, this seems a trivial turn. In 1982, it was revolutionary. Most provocative was the suggestion that simple physical signs, paradox and alternans, could detect fatigue

**Fig. 1** Sequence of changes in arterial carbon dioxide tension ( $\text{PaCO}_2$ ), respiratory rate, minute ventilation, and high/low ( $H/L$ ) ratio of power spectrum of the diaphragmatic electromyogram in a patient who failed a weaning trial. Ventilator discontinuation was followed by an immediate change in the high/low ratio, followed by a slow increase in respiratory rate, then abdominal paradox (and alternans), and finally hypercapnia. (From Cohen et al. [23])



and provide a means for minute-by-minute monitoring of weaning progression. But Cohen [23] did not attempt to quantify chest-wall motion.

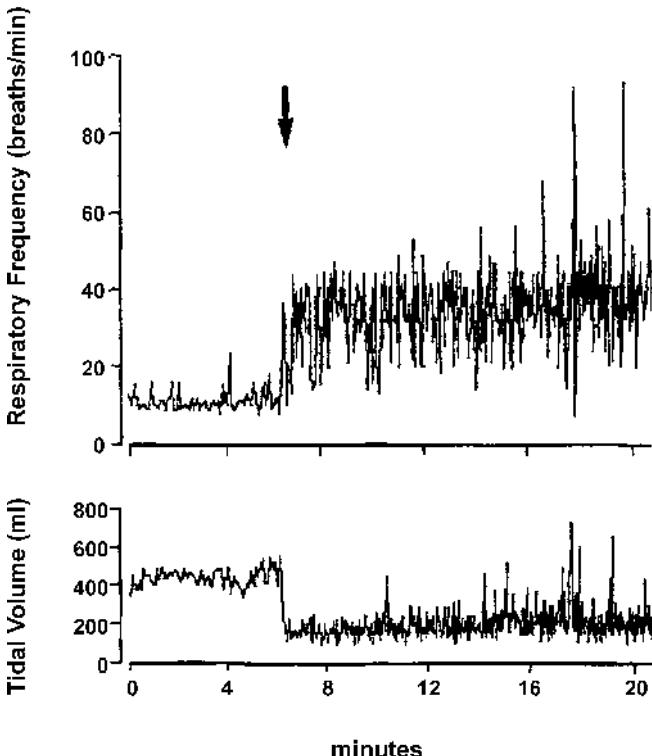
Stirred by these findings, we used inductive plethysmography to obtain quantitative indices of chest-wall motion [24]. Abnormal motion, however, turned out to be common in both success and failure patients [24]. More-

over, motion did not worsen over time in weaning-failure patients, suggesting it did not reflect fatigue (a negation subsequently confirmed [25]).

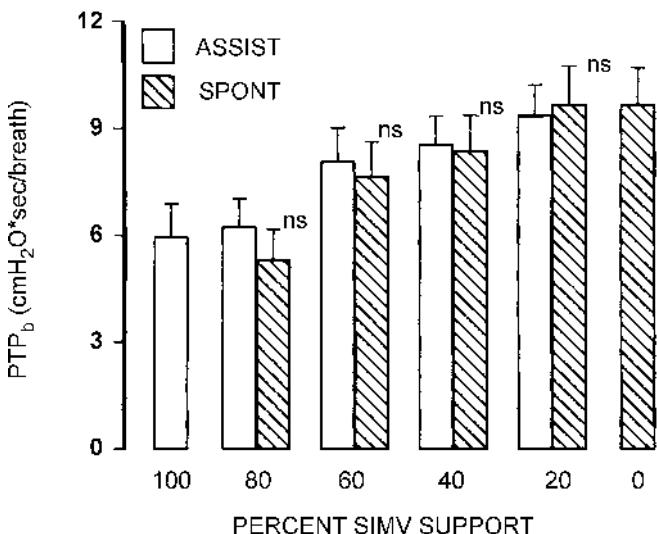
Although our study was undertaken to quantify chest-wall motion, we also analyzed breathing pattern (since the data were available) [26]. We expected acute hypercapnia to result from a fall in respiratory drive, whereas drive

rose. Rather, 81% of the variance in  $\text{PaCO}_2$  was accounted for by development of rapid shallow breathing [26]. Alveolar–arterial oxygen gradient did not widen. These findings suggested a number of mechanisms were unlikely to cause weaning failure: respiratory center depression, respiratory muscle fatigue, and ventilation–perfusion abnormality [26]. Instead, rapid shallow breathing dominated.

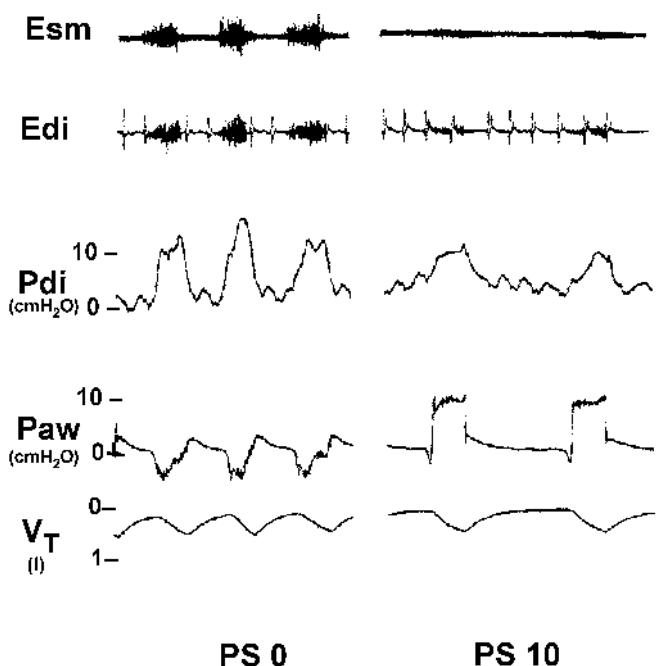
Before 1986, several investigators had reported that tidal volume and respiratory frequency did not discriminate between weaning-success and weaning-failure patients [15, 17, 19, 27]. Since 1986, researchers have repeatedly confirmed their discriminatory power [28]. How could such a striking distinction have gone undetected? In previous studies, we had documented considerable breath-to-breath variability in breath components, and thus used large breath samples in our breathing-pattern studies [29, 30] (Fig. 2). Most importantly, we believed that subtle differences in breathing pattern could yield as much pathophysiologic insight as data generated by more sophisticated methodology. In the mid-1980s, physicians did not focus on respiratory rate. Rate was a nursing measurement, along with charting of temperature and



**Fig. 2** A time-series, breath-by-breath plot of respiratory frequency and tidal volume in a patient who failed a weaning trial. Discontinuation of ventilator support (arrow) resulted in almost immediate rapid shallow breathing. Note the marked breath-to-breath variability in the data. (From Tobin et al. [26])



**Fig. 3** Inspiratory pressure-time product per breath for assisted, mandatory breaths (open bars) and intervening spontaneous breaths (cross-hatched bars). Patient effort was equivalent for mandatory and spontaneous breaths at every level of synchronized intermittent mechanical ventilation (SIMV). (From Marini et al. [33])



**Fig. 4** Electromyographic recordings of the sternomastoid muscle (Esm) and diaphragm (Edi), transdiaphragmatic pressure (Pdi), airway pressure (Paw), and tidal volume (VT) in a ventilator-supported patient. Compared with 0, pressure support of 10 cmH<sub>2</sub>O decreased (but did not abolish) sternomastoid and diaphragmatic electrical activity, decreased Pdi, increased VT, and slowed respiratory rate. (From Brochard et al. [35])

number of bowel motions [31]. And bedside spirometers measured total minute ventilation – spontaneous tidal volume did not become part of bedside testing until the 1990s [31].

Research into patient–ventilator interaction also advanced (weaning) understanding. In 1985, Marini and colleagues reported that subjects receiving assist-control ventilation performed half as much work as done by the ventilator [32]. This was heresy. It had been dogma that connecting a patient to a ventilator lessened work to near zero. In 1988, Marini reported that patient effort was virtually the same during mandatory IMV breaths as during the intervening spontaneous breaths (Fig. 3) [33]. This was blasphemy. By the late 1980s, IMV had been deified as the nonpareil weaning technique [20].

The importance of rigorous evaluation was recognized by the time pressure support was launched. In 1987 and 1989, Brochard, Lemaire, Harf and colleagues reported recordings of transdiaphragmatic pressure, electromyography, and work of breathing (Fig. 4) [34, 35]. Armed with such data, they delineated the pressure-support level that avoided fatigue but still maintained diaphragmatic activity. These studies ensured that misunderstanding about a mode's ability to assuage work, as with IMV, did not recur.

## Predictor tests, phase II (1985 and after)

The mid-1980s saw a flurry of reports on airway occlusion pressure ( $P_{0.1}$ ). Herrera (1985) [36], Sassoon (1987) [37] and colleagues reported that low  $P_{0.1}$  (low respiratory drive) was superior to conventional tests in predicting weaning success.

Montgomery, Pierson and colleagues [38] reported that  $P_{0.1}$  was reliable only when expressed as ratio of  $P_{0.1}$  during  $\text{CO}_2$  stimulation to baseline  $P_{0.1}$ . These authors were the first to discuss results in terms of sensitivity and specificity. They noted that ventilatory response to  $\text{CO}_2$  was higher in success patients, “although overlap occurred indicating that this predictor could neither be 100 percent sensitive or specific” [38]. In contrast, ratio of  $P_{0.1}$  during  $\text{CO}_2$  stimulation to baseline  $P_{0.1}$  “separated all weaning failure patients from all those who succeeded and was thus, a completely specific and sensitive test.”

The quotations are revelatory. They portray a mindset where a test is judged reliable only if it attains 100% sensitivity and 100% specificity. The authors made no distinction between desirability of high sensitivity versus high specificity [38]. This monolithic orientation pervades to this day.

In 1986, Milic-Emili [39] proposed an index that integrated several respiratory muscle characteristics. We followed his suggestion, and developed the CROP index, which integrated compliance, rate, oxygenation, and (maximal inspiratory) pressure [40]. CROP proved supe-

rior to conventional tests. Cognizant that rapid shallow breathing was the dominant finding in our 1986 pathophysiology study [26], we quantified this phenomenon as frequency-to-tidal volume ratio ( $f/V_T$ ). This test proved superior to all others [40].

The 1991  $f/V_T$  paper [40] is typically cited as the source for usefulness of rapid shallow breathing in weaning prediction. In reality, this paper has much less intellectual content than our 1986 pathophysiological study [26]. The merit of the 1991 paper was its experimental design. First, all studies up to then involved post-hoc data analysis (which inflates test reliability). Instead, we first determined threshold values for each predictor test in a “training-data set”, and then investigated reliability in a prospective “validation-data set.” Second, clinicians were blinded to CROP and  $f/V_T$ . Third, results were expressed in terms of sensitivity, specificity, positive-predictive value, negative-predictive value, and receiver-operating-characteristic (ROC) curves [40].

Since 1991,  $f/V_T$  has been evaluated in more than 25 studies [41]. Unfortunately, many authors have not complied with the canons for diagnostic-test evaluation, grounded on Bayes' theorem. In particular, many have ignored conditional independence, pre-test probability, test-referral bias, and spectrum bias – each of which can corrupt reported measures of test reliability [41].

## Pathophysiology, phase II (1989 and after)

The multiple inert-gas technique paints vivid pictures of pulmonary gas exchange. This technique enabled Torres, Rodriguez-Roisin and colleagues (1989) [42] to show that acute hypercapnia and ventilation–perfusion maldistribution in weaning-failure patients results from rapid shallow breathing. Using the same technique, Beydon, Harf, Lemaire and colleagues (1991) [43] confirmed shallow breathing as the major cause of ventilation–perfusion maldistribution. Years later, we studied tissue gas exchange using mixed-venous oxygen saturation [44]. Saturation fell progressively in failure patients consequent to a relative decrease in convective oxygen transport combined with an increase in tissue oxygen extraction.

In a series of studies, Bates, Rossi, Milic-Emili and colleagues [45, 46, 47, 48] used the rapid airway-occlusion technique to characterize respiratory mechanics. Through inventive mathematical modeling, they partitioned the relative roles of ohmic resistance, viscoelastic behavior, and time-constant inhomogeneity. The main abnormality in ventilator-dependent patients resulted from airway resistance, with less contribution from time-constant inhomogeneities and abnormal viscoelastic behavior of the lung. Chest-wall contribution was negligible. With this methodology, it was possible to find out whether severe

disturbance of mechanics made weaning failure little more than enactment of a predestined state.

In 1997, we found that passive respiratory mechanics were severely disturbed in patients who failed subsequent weaning, but no worse than in patients who weaned successfully [49]. This contrasted with findings during an ensuing 30–60-min T-tube trial. Inspiratory effort was much higher in weaning-failure patients consequent to marked increases in resistance, elastance and auto-PEEP [50]. That mechanics were markedly worse in failure patients during the weaning trial, but equivalent to those in success patients immediately beforehand, indicated that some mechanism associated with spontaneous breathing caused the abnormalities. That mechanism is still unidentified.

More deranged mechanics in failure patients was confirmed by Vassilakopoulos et al. [51]. They studied a group of patients at two points: shortly after failing a T-tube trial, and about 9 days later, shortly before successful extubation. Over this interval, airway resistance and auto-PEEP decreased substantially. Multiple logistic regression uncovered two determinants of weaning failure: tension-time index and  $f/V_T$ .

After the 1982 Cohen study [23], the role of muscle fatigue in weaning failure was not reexamined directly until 1994. Goldstone, Moxham and Green [52] reported slowing of maximum relaxation rate (of transdiaphragmatic pressure), a harbinger for fatigue, in failure patients but not in success patients. Stimulating the phrenic nerves and recording transdiaphragmatic pressure provides the most direct measure of diaphragmatic fatigue. Using this technique, we were surprised to find that not even one weaning-failure patient developed fatigue [53]. Related analyses disclosed why. Failure patients became progressively distressed during the trial, leading clinicians to reinstate ventilator support before patients had breathed long enough to develop fatigue. That is, monitoring clinical signs of distress provides sufficient warning to avoid fatigue.

### Weaning techniques, phase II (1994 and after)

The year 1994 ushered in a new era of weaning research: Brochard and colleagues published the first randomized controlled trial (RCT) [54]. They randomized 109 difficult-to-wean patients to T-tube trials, IMV, or pressure support. At 21 days, ventilator dependency was less with pressure support than with other techniques. This report was revolutionary. Its main message was that steps chosen for weaning influenced duration of ventilator dependency. Second, 76% of 456 patients entered into the study passed the first T-tube trial (without “weaning”). Third, a 2-hr limit was imposed on T-tube trials; back then, trials often lasted 24 h [55, 56].

The major contribution of RCTs to clinical research is the elimination of susceptibility bias, a source of major dis-

parity in baseline states of compared groups. “Beyond this achievement,” notes Feinstein [57], “randomization itself makes no other scientific contribution”. Despite the name, use of control groups is not limited to RCTs. Investigators studying weaning-failure pathophysiology have commonly included success patients as controls.

Knowledge gained through research depends ultimately on the ingenuity of the hypothesis under interrogation. RCTs are typically designed by research groups. Committees are hardly renowned for maverick ideas. So questions subjected to RCT testing are characterized by their sameness. Our 1995 RCT copied the general design of the Brochard trial, though we specified different steps [58]. T-tube trials proved superior to pressure support. The different outcomes in the two RCTs primarily reflected different steps in the algorithms of the two studies [54, 58].

In 1997, Ely et al. [59] borrowed two steps from previous studies: measurement of  $f/V_T$  (and other predictors), followed by a T-tube trial. The two-step approach achieved faster weaning than usual care. This study has since been portrayed as a comparison of weaning-by-protocol versus usual care. But this portrayal flouts a fundamental requirement for sound science: need for internal validity. Of patients in the usual-care arm, 76% were managed with IMV [59]. Not one protocol patient was so managed. To conclude that protocols are superior, weaning methods need to be the same in the protocol and usual-care arms.

### Lessons in metascience

It would be naïve to regard the weaning story as a microcosm of the entire scientific process. Nonetheless, it offers several metascientific lessons.

The steam in science’s engine is the novel question. Medical practice today depends on what questions our predecessors asked. But questions are not there for the picking, like apples on a tree. People have to formulate them. The reason why one researcher makes greater contributions to science than an equally talented coeval is courage to raise antinominal questions [60]. To think the unthinkable. As did Marini, when he suspected that ventilated patients might be performing prodigious respiratory work, and that IMV was largely ineffectual [32, 33]. But getting heresies published is not easy – the acceptance date on Marini’s 1995 paper provides a clue to that effect.

Being too novel poses other problems. The 1977 report by Henning, Shubin, and Weil incorporated the most advanced scientific techniques [22]. But others did not build on their findings. The paper’s sophistication was about a decade ahead of its time. Yes, researchers live in constant dread of being pipped at the post. But if they arrive before the zeitgeist, others cannot build on their

work. The most famous example is Gregor Mendel's paper in 1866 [61]. Not for another thirty years did general biological theory find a slot in which to fit the abbot's discovery [6].

Allied to discovery is serendipity. We did not set out to show that rapid shallow breathing is a hallmark of weaning failure [26]. Rather, our motivation was to quantify rib cage–abdominal motion [24]. But serendipity per se does not produce discoveries [60]. Instead, it produces opportunities for making discoveries. The person making the serendipitous connection is already primed to appreciate its significance. "Luck favors only the prepared mind," mused Pasteur.

Before the mid-1980s, rapid shallow breathing went unheeded by weaning researchers [15, 17, 19, 27, 37]. After it was pronounced a hallmark of weaning failure, the connection was reported over and over again [28]. The switch from non-detection to repeated confirmation is a consequence of *mental set* (as labeled by psychology researchers). Mental set describes the set of beliefs that determines what a person perceives (the prepared mind). With a mental set, a goal (detecting rapid shallow breathing) selects and shapes what it is a researcher sees. Without a mental set, the obvious becomes invisible. The researcher is distracted and blinded by a blizzard of other possible observations. In his magisterial history of the Scientific Revolution, Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979) [62] concluded, "of all forms of mental activity, the most difficult to induce ... is the art of handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework, all of which virtually means putting on a different kind of thinking-cap for a moment."

The mid-1980s opened a new chapter in the weaning story. Like elsewhere in critical care, greater emphasis was placed on RCTs – in the belief that this was the only science that improved patient outcome. The purpose of science, however, is to enhance *understanding*, not simply accumulate facts [60]. Facts generated through research improve patient outcome only if they enhance physician understanding. Tanenbaum [63] undertook an ethnographic study of how clinicians think. For only a small fraction of time did clinicians engage in probabilistic reasoning – based on results of RCTs. The vast majority of reasoning involved models with moving parts, like heart valves – the type of understanding gained through physiology research.

Few seminal advances in the *understanding* of weaning originated in RCTs. Take weaning techniques. It was Marini's study of patient–ventilator interaction that highlighted the limitations of IMV [33]. Brochard's group, already steeped in pathophysiology methods [34, 35], built on Marini's understanding and undertook the first RCT [54]. The blending of different research disciplines among the Parisians exemplifies how cross-fertilization leads to scientific progress. New ideas rarely arise out of

the blue. More often, they represent novel combinations of existing ideas [60]. To make a connection, a researcher has to traverse interdisciplinary boundaries. For the Parisians, this involved combining knowledge gained through physiology research with knowledge of trial design. Cognitive psychologists view cross-fertilization as a major source of mental creativity [60].

The introduction of  $f/V_T$  as a weaning-predictor test provides another example of cross-fertilization. For years before the 1991 report [40], we had been studying control of breathing in various settings – including weaning failure [26, 29, 30]. Independently, we had a specific interest in ICU monitoring [31]. Monitoring fundamentally boils down to the serial application of diagnostic tests. An understanding of the principles of diagnostic testing (garnered through expertise in monitoring) combined with immersion in physiology research gave birth to the  $f/V_T$  test [40].

The framework posited by Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* helps select which papers were seminal in advancing a field [64]. Kuhn averred that inquiry is dominated by long periods of *normal science*, punctured intermittently by sharp revolutions (*paradigm shifts*). Normal science, quantified by the amount of me-too research, makes few demands on an individual's intellect and psyche [60]. Kuhn concluded, "Few people who are not actually practitioners of a mature science realize how much mop-up work" there is to do. And, "Mopping-up operations are what engage most scientists throughout their careers" [64]. The seminal advances in weaning *understanding* (and thus management) resulted from pathophysiology research on respiratory muscles and breathing pattern [23, 26, 32, 33, 34], and cross-fertilization between pathophysiology research and fundamentals of diagnostic testing [40] and principles of RCT design [54]. The many RCTs published after the first [54] fit the category of *normal science*: they help with the dotting of i's and crossing of t's. But they have not seeded ideas on how to make the next quantum leap in this field.

## Conclusion

As long as ventilators are used, the impetus for greater understanding of weaning will continue. We do a better job of weaning easy patients than in the 1970s, but more complex patients populate today's units. As a practicing intensivist, nothing taxes my intellect more than the difficult-to-wean patient. I know of no problem where connoisseurship of the individual intensivist has a greater influence on patient wellbeing and outcome.

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