

We will try to publish authors' responses in the same edition with readers' comments. Time constraints may prevent this in some cases. The problem is compounded in the case of a bimonthly journal where continuity of comment and redress is difficult to achieve. When the redress appears 2 months after the comment, 4 months will have passed since the original article was published. Therefore, we would suggest to our readers that their correspondence about published papers be submitted as soon as possible after the article appears.

Dorsal Penile Nerve Block

To the Editor: The recent article by Toffler and colleagues¹ reviews dorsal penile nerve block (DPNB) for newborn circumcision and reports a survey of 100 family physicians to ascertain acceptance of the technique. Data are presented that support the benefits of the procedure. While the survey results are interesting, we must question the premise of the article, that DPNB during newborn circumcision has been proved both safe and effective.

There is a paucity of research on the technique. We recently completed a MEDLINE literature review of all English articles that paired the subject heading "circumcision" with "nerve block," "lidocaine," or "bupivacaine." Of the 85 articles retrieved, only 19 were appropriate research studies.²⁻²⁰ Mintz and Grillo studied 1133 subjects including 887 who received DPNB.¹⁰ In the other 18 articles, a total of 840 subjects were studied, including 589 who received DPNB. Thus, DPNB has been studied and reported in fewer than 1500 patients. In only three articles (139 subjects) was the follow-up longer than 1 week, and in no case was it longer than 2 months. The overall complication rate was 0.8 percent, and many of these complications were mild. On the other hand, one article reported two cases of impotence of unknown duration following DPNB in adults,²¹ and another reported two cases of gangrene following DPNB in infants.²² Of note, the Mintz and Grillo study reported no complications, while the complication rate in the other 18 articles was 2 percent.

The above references show that the procedure works; that is, there is some relief of pain in more than 80 percent of the patients. Safety, however, has not been proved. There is only one large-scale study, and it appears to underreport complications. There is no study evaluating the long-term follow-up of patients after DPNB, and some case reports suggest there may be long-term sequelae. Perhaps the lack of widespread acceptance of DPNB noted by Toffler and colleagues reflects the lack of safety data. In any case, the routine use of DPNB in newborn circumcision is not yet supported.

Theodore G. Ganiats, M.D.

Gregory W. Schmidt
San Diego, CA

References

1. Toffler WL, Sinclair AE, White KA. Dorsal penile nerve block during newborn circumcision: underutilization of a proven technique? *J Am Board Fam Pract* 1990; 3:171-4.
2. Lau JT. Penile block for pain relief after circumcision in children. A randomized, prospective trial. *Am J Surg* 1984; 147:797-9.
3. Bacon AK. An alternative block for post circumcision analgesia. *Anaesth Intensive Care* 1977; 5:63-4.
4. Yeoman PM, Cooke R, Hain WR. Penile block for circumcision? A comparison with caudal blockade. *Anaesthesia* 1983; 38:862-6.
5. Soliman MG, Tremblay NA. Nerve block of the penis for postoperative pain relief in children. *Anesth Analg* 1978; 57:495-8.
6. Dalens B, Vanneville G, Dechelotte P. Penile block via the subpubic space in 100 children. *Anesth Analg* 1989; 69:41-5.
7. Tree-Trakarn T, Pirayavaraporn S. Postoperative pain relief for circumcision in children: comparison among morphine, nerve block, and topical analgesia. *Anesthesiology* 1985; 62:519-22.
8. White J, Harrison B, Richmond P, Procter A, Curran J. Postoperative analgesia for circumcision. *Br Med J [Clin Res]* 1983; 286:1934.
9. Holve RL, Bromberger PJ, Groveman HD, Klauber MR, Dixon SD, Snyder JM. Regional anesthesia during newborn circumcision. Effect on infant pain response. *Clin Pediatr* 1983; 22:813-8.
10. Mintz MR, Grillo R. Dorsal Penile nerve block for circumcision. *Clin Pediatr* 1989; 28:590-1.
11. Kirya C, Werthmann MW Jr. Neonatal circumcision and penile dorsal nerve block—a painless procedure. *J Pediatr* 1978; 92:998-1000.
12. Stang HJ, Gunnar MR, Snellman L, Condon LM, Kestenbaum R. Local anesthesia for neonatal circumcision. Effects on distress and cortisol response. *JAMA* 1988; 259:1507-11.
13. Masciello AL. Anesthesia for neonatal circumcision: local anesthesia is better than dorsal penile nerve block. *Obstet Gynecol* 1990; 75:834-8.
14. Maxwell LG, Yaster M, Wetzel RC, Niebyl JR. Penile nerve block for newborn circumcision. *Obstet Gynecol* 1987; 70:415-9.
15. Williamson PS, Williamson ML. Physiologic stress reduction by a local anesthetic during newborn circumcision. *Pediatrics* 1983; 71:36-40.
16. Carlsson P, Svensson J. The duration of pain relief after penile block to boys undergoing circumcision. *Acta Anesthesiol Scand* 1984; 28:432-4.
17. Vater M, Wandless J. Caudal or dorsal nerve block? A comparison of two local anaesthetic techniques for postoperative analgesia following day case circumcision. *Acta Anesthesiol Scand* 1985; 29:175-9.
18. Poma PA. Painless neonatal circumcision. *Int J Gynaecol Obstet* 1980; 18:308-9.
19. Murphy DF, Gallagher EM. Dorsal nerve blockade for pain relief after circumcision. *Ir J Med Sci* 1984; 153:282-3.
20. McGlinchey J, McLean P, Walsh A. Day case penile surgery with penile block for postoperative pain relief. *Ir Med J* 1983; 76:319.

21. Palmer JM, Link D. Impotence following anesthesia for elective circumcision. *JAMA* 1979; 24:2635-6.
22. Sara CA, Lowry CJ. A complication of circumcision and dorsal nerve block of the penis. *Anaesth Intensive Care* 1985; 13:79-82.

The above letter was referred to the authors of the article in question, who offer the following reply.

To the Editor: We commend Ganiats and Schmidt for their detailed MEDLINE literature review. At the same time, some of the findings drawn from their own review of the existing literature seem inconsistent with their conclusions. For example, they describe a "paucity of research" and then reference 19 "appropriate research articles." They conclude that "one large-scale study . . . appears to underreport complications," yet fail to state the basis for this conclusion. They also conclude that the lack of widespread acceptance of dorsal penile nerve block reflects a lack of safety data, yet only 27 percent of the doctors we surveyed stated that they were not using the technique because of a "concern of risk."¹

The report of two cases of gangrene following dorsal penile nerve block in infants deserves clarification. The technique used was distinctly different from that first described by Kirya and Werthmann and also utilized bupivacaine as the local anesthetic.^{2,3} Despite the apparently complete MEDLINE review with 22 references, the authors have excluded work by Stang and Snellman, who reported their experience with dorsal penile nerve block in more than 2000 circumcisions without any clinically significant complications.⁴ Ganiats and Schmidt's concern about the potential for future impotence seems unlikely with the clinical observation of postcircumcision erections in babies, whether dorsal penile nerve block is employed or whether it is not. In short, the conclusion that dorsal penile nerve block "has not yet been proved safe" seems inconsistent with the very data that they present, just as it is inconsistent with our own experience.

Additionally, although not impossible, it seems improbable that after 12 years of using this technique nationally, other complications have not surfaced. A conservative estimate of the number of procedures done to date would number in the hundreds of thousands or more. In addition, the procedure has been performed for even longer by anesthesiologists for postoperative anesthesia for circumcision in older persons.

Nevertheless, we agree that further research involving long-term effects is worthwhile to reassure physicians who have persistent serious concerns about possible long-term consequences. In fact, such studies are underway by at least two separate investigators in Minnesota (personal communication). Meanwhile, the procedure clearly decreases the pain associated with circumcision in infants, positively affects the behavior following the procedure, and clearly assuages the guilt that many parents feel when they decide to have their

children circumcised and consider the pain that would otherwise result from the procedure.

William L. Toffler, M.D.
Ann E. Sinclair, M.S.
Keith White, M.D.
Portland, OR

References

1. Toffler WL, Sinclair AE, White KA. Dorsal penile nerve block during newborn circumcision: underutilization of a proven technique? *J Am Board Fam Pract* 1990; 3: 171-4.
2. Kirya C, Werthmann MW, Jr. Neonatal circumcision and penile dorsal nerve block—a painless procedure. *J of Pediatr* 92:998, 1978.
3. Sara CA, Lowry CJ. A complication of circumcision and dorsal nerve block of the penis. *Anesth Inten Care*, 1985; 13:79-82.
4. Stang HJ, Snellman L. Dorsal penile nerve block for circumcision [Letter]. *JAMA* 1989; 261:702.

Infectious Vaginitis

To the Editor: In the article entitled "Diagnosis and Management of Infectious Vaginitis,"¹ Dr. Quan states, "Controversy continues to exist whether the man consort(s) of the patient with bacterial vaginosis requires simultaneous treatment."² Dr. Quan cites our study and correctly indicates that we concluded that treatment of the male partner produces a short-term reduction in recurrence rates. He then references three other reports, which he states were studies that did not report a benefit from male sexual partner treatment.³⁻⁵ Unfortunately, of the three references that Dr. Quan cites, one is a review article that simply says that male sexual partner treatment has not been shown to be effective, and the authors do not provide references.³ Another is a dose-duration study of metronidazole treatment in patients with bacterial vaginosis, and no data are described about male sexual partner treatment. The other reference, even though it is to a study that examines the issue of male sexual partner treatment, lacks adequate statistical power to conclude that male sexual partner treatment does indeed make no difference in cure rates or recurrence rates.⁶ Although it seems from Dr. Quan's article that there is only one study that supports the effectiveness of male sexual partner treatment in women with bacterial vaginosis and three against, this is clearly not the case. We believe this is an inaccurate portrayal of this controversial area.

It is controversial because investigators do not enroll enough women in their studies to insure adequate statistical power to find a clinically significant difference in cure rates or recurrence rates, should it indeed exist. We think that clinicians would pay attention to a 20 percent difference in cure rates between a group in which the male sexual partner was treated versus not treated⁷ and have calculated the number needed in each group at various statistical powers, from a minimal power of 0.80 to a maximal power of 0.95, using a baseline cure rate of 90 percent, which is the baseline cure rate found in most studies if the woman is treated with a 7-day course of