Midazolam Can Decrease Salivation During Bronchoscopy

To the Editor:

We read with interest the response letter by Cowl \(^1\) (March 2010) to the study by Malik et al\(^2\) (August 2009) concerning the use of antisialogogues in bronchoscopy. Based on the results of two previous studies, Cowl points out that antisecretory drugs do not result in clinically significant differences in cough or secretion control and can even be considered harmful.

We have a major concern about the designs of the studies by Malik et al\(^2\) and Cowl et al.\(^1\) In a recent randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, prospective, quantitative study,\(^4\) we demonstrated that midazolam decreases both unstimulated and stimulated saliva flow rates (from 0.31 g/min to 0.18 g/min and from 0.78 g/min to 0.31 g/min, respectively, \(P=0.00\)). The study included 40 children aged 9 to 12. Unstimulated and paraffin-stimulated saliva was collected from each child at baseline and 10 min after midazolam injection. This antisialogogue effect of midazolam can be responsible for the barely statistically significant difference in visual analog scale scores between placebo and the anticholinergic drugs observed in the studies by Malik et al\(^2\) and Cowl et al.\(^1\) We are of the opinion that future studies should exclude midazolam from the design when the antisialogogue effects of anticholinergic drugs are assessed.

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Dr Apilogullari and colleagues express concerns about the design of two studies in CHEST (July 2000 and August 2009) that compared the use of antisialogogues as pretreatment strategies for adult bronchoscopy,\(^5\) citing that midazolam used concurrently for sedation can confound results because midazolam itself can also result in a reduction in secretions (as shown in their own recent study of a small cohort of pediatric patients \(N=40\) who underwent measured simulated salivary flow rates).\(^6\) Unfortunately, they seem to have missed the entire point of the prior discussion.\(^4\)

The clinical question hinges on whether the use of antisialogogues affects the outcome. If there is indeed an antisialogogue effect from the use of midazolam, then the use of other secretion-reducing agents is clearly not needed. A clinically significant result in the initial randomized trials would have meant the use of antisialogogues for bronchoscopy may provide a clear benefit to the bronchoscopist and patient in terms of the ability to inspect the airway and improve the overall comfort of the procedure above and beyond that provided without their use. That was not determined in those studies, even after randomization of >1,000 patients between the two trials. Although Apilogullari and colleagues\(^1\) should be congratulated for their efforts in quantitating salivary flow rates, that result does not alter the fact that the use of antisialogogues is unnecessary prior to routine adult bronchoscopy and does not ultimately affect the measured clinical endpoints, as outlined in the original randomized trials.

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Response

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