Reliability of Polymerase Chain Reaction in Diagnosis of Mycobacterial Infection

To the Editor:

In his discussion of the reliability of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) in the diagnosis of mycobacterial infection (July 1996), Dr. Ma gives a table summarizing the reported clinical experiences with this test. The table gives the sensitivities and specificities and the positive and negative predictive values.

I have already explained at considerable length that only sensitivity and specificity are characteristics of the test (CHEST 1994; 106:655–56; 1995; 107:592). Predictive values, both positive and negative, depend as well on the prevalence of the condition in the population being tested. These values are therefore irrelevant, and thus potentially misleading in any discussion of the reliability of a test.

Bayesian mathematics is tricky and the literature is full of mistakes. If Dr. Ma will take the trouble to work an example along with me, he will have a much better perception of the whole problem and will not again fall into error.

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REFERENCES

Unilateral Pulmonary Artery Agenesis in Adulthood

Not Always a Benign Disease

To the Editor:

We read with interest the recent article by Dr. Bouros and colleagues on “The Varied Manifestation of Pulmonary Artery Agenesis in Adulthood” (September 1995). In that article, six patients, aged 17 to 20 years, were reported, and all of them were...