Communications to the Editor

To the Editor:

Tracheal Colonization in Pneumonia

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Based on their prospective study (CHEST; August 1999), Cendrero and colleagues state that bacteria colonizing the gastric flora are often responsible for tracheal colonization but are rarely the cause of nosocomial pneumonia. Indeed, different types of bacteria causing upper vs lower respiratory tract infections have been demonstrated before. Independent patterns of colonization may be found in the oropharynxal and tracheal secretions from the same patient. For example, enteric Gram-negative bacteria usually colonize the oropharynx while Pseudomonads favor the lower respiratory tract.

The statement that the gastric flora is not a major cause of pneumonia has been indirectly confirmed by Cook et al, who found that the use of sucralfate instead of H2-antagonists for stress ulcer prophylaxis had no benefit either in decreasing mortality or in the incidence of ventilator-associated pneumonia.

Several unsuccessful trials with selective digestive decontamination (SDD) with the use of nonabsorbable antibiotics argue against theories that consider the stomach an important source of nosocomial pneumonia in patients on mechanical ventilation. We hope that the article by Cendrero and colleagues might convince physicians who still believe in the SDD concept that there is no evidence for using SDD for the prevention of ventilator-associated pneumonia, in particular because of its risk for induction of local antibiotic resistance.

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REFERENCES


Infants Exposed to Maternal Smoking and With a Family History of Asthma

To the Editor:

We read with special interest the article by Sheikh et al (CHEST; July 1999), who studied infants using the rapid compression technique. They found an increase in forced expiratory flow (FEF) at 25% of the remaining tidal volume (Vf) following the administration of albuterol in infants with a family history of asthma. The authors concluded that this was due to reversible bronchospasm, which seemed absent in infants who were exposed to maternal smoking and did not show such improvement, and they suggested that this technique could be used in recognizing different phenotypes of wheezy infants. If this interpretation is correct, this would have important practical implications.

References


that attention should focus more on the shape of the (partial) forced expiratory flow-volume curves of infants with respiratory diseases.

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REFERENCES


The “Breathing-Bag” Sign in the Diagnosis of Tracheoesophageal Fistula in Patients Receiving Mechanical Ventilation

To the Editor:

We have read with interest the excellent letter of Dr. Rampaul and colleagues (CHEST; July 1999) regarding the “breathing bag” sign in the early diagnosis of tracheoesophageal fistula (TEF) in patients receiving positive pressure ventilation. The phasic inflation and deflation of the nasogastric bag with respiratory excursions is reported by them as not previously described.1

In our experience, we described in 1996 a preexisting unrecognized TEF in an acute respiratory failure patient that was discovered at the moment of starting positive pressure ventilation.2 Only a few cases of asymptomatic TEF presenting immediately for the first time in patients receiving positive pressure ventilation have been previously reported during surgical general anesthesia,3,4 but not among adult ICU patients. We were also able to see this breathing bag sign in our patient and were tempted to describe it in the same way as Rampaul and colleagues.1 However, we found in one of these previous reports that Dakaraju and colleagues5 in 1974 had already described how “the polythene bag, which had been placed over the end of the nasogastric tube, ballooned out each time the lungs were inflated” in a 20-year-old woman receiving mechanical ventilation with a previously undiagnosed esophagobronchial fistula.3

![Figure 1. VmaxFRC in 39 wheezy infants before and after administration of 250 μg inhaled terbutaline via a spacer. O = asthma; ● = other wheezing disorders. * = p < 0.02 (paired t test).](image-url)