

Shock Values

ACCORDING to anesthesia lore, we killed more sailors with thiopental than the Japanese did with bombs after the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹ The story is apocryphal,² but it makes a vivid teaching point that the potency of intravenous anesthetics is greatly increased during hemorrhagic shock, which is probably why we drill this story into our residents to this day.

Since that time we have learned to resuscitate trauma patients aggressively with fluid, usually crystalloid, before induction of anesthesia. In this issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY, Johnson *et al.* demonstrate that aggressive fluid resuscitation after massive hemorrhage in a pig model fails to completely reverse the profound increase in propofol potency induced by hemorrhage³ even though hemodynamics were nearly restored to baseline levels. Figure 5 of this paper tells the entire story: a 4 mg/kg bolus of propofol drops the bispectral index of control animals to 50. However, the same dose drives the bispectral index to 0 (isoelectricity) in animals after severe hemorrhage, even though they have been aggressively fluid resuscitated.

This manuscript is the most recent installment in a series of papers from this laboratory, documenting the influence of shock on the clinical pharmacology of fentanyl,⁴ remifentanyl,⁵ etomidate,⁶ and propofol.⁷ These articles tell a consistent story. Shock decreased the size of the central compartment and systemic clearance for fentanyl⁴ and remifentanyl,⁵ resulting in increased concentrations. Shock decreased the central and peripheral volumes of etomidate, increasing the blood levels by about 20%.⁶ In the case of propofol, shock decreased the intercompartmental clearance of propofol, significantly raising concentrations and resulting in increased propofol potency.⁷

Compartmental models of pharmacokinetics are an attempt to provide physiologic insight into the mathematical relationship between dose and concentration. With the probable exception of systemic clearance, there is little physiologic or anatomical "truth" to the volumes and clearances identified in pharmacokinetic models. In all likelihood, the reported changes in volumes and clearances for propofol, etomidate, fentanyl,

and remifentanyl tell the same story, regardless of the specific details: in shock the body becomes a blood-brain circuit, at the expense of circulation to the gut, liver, and muscles. This results in higher brain concentrations, more rapid onset, and more profound effect.

Propofol, however, has another dimension to the increased potency in shock. Hemorrhagic shock has little effect on intrinsic brain sensitivity to etomidate⁶ or remifentanyl.⁵ Only for propofol does the brain become more sensitive in shock.^{3,7,8} This may reflect the complex relationship propofol has with its lipid vehicle^{9,10} and blood proteins.¹¹ However, propofol's combination of higher brain concentrations and increased brain sensitivity in hemorrhage is profound and dangerous.

In a series of simulations using the pharmacokinetics from these series of manuscripts, I calculated the reduction in dose to achieve the same effect with a bolus or a 10-min infusion. The results are shown in figure 1. With propofol, the dose should be reduced by 80 to 90% for a patient (or at least a pig) in hemorrhagic shock. The reduction is the same, whether anesthesia is induced by a bolus or a 10-min infusion. I will repeat this for emphasis: **a patient in hemorrhagic shock should receive only 10–20% of the propofol dose that a healthy patient would receive.** Even after vigorous fluid resuscitation, the propofol dose should be about half of what a healthy patient would receive.

The real surprise is etomidate. There is virtually no change in etomidate dose requirement with hemorrhage. Etomidate is often thought of as the drug of choice for hemodynamically compromised patients. However, I never expected its pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic profile to be so resistant to hemorrhage-induced alteration.

Figure 1 suggests that perhaps etomidate could be combined with 50% of the typical fentanyl dose. Although these articles indicate that no more than half of a typical fentanyl dose should be used in trauma, it might need to be reduced even further. To date Johnson *et al.* have not explored drug interactions in massive hemorrhage. The interaction between opioids and hypnotics may be more profound in hemorrhagic shock than in control patients. This would be a logical next study in this line of research. It would also be very interesting to know why etomidate does not show the pharmacokinetic changes expected from the physiologic alterations that accompany shock. Surely it does not undo the physiologic shunting of cardiac output to a blood-brain circuit: that would be catastrophic. Similarly, why does brain sensitivity increase to propofol, but not to etomidate, when both work at the GABA_A receptor?

The "take home" message to the clinician is that

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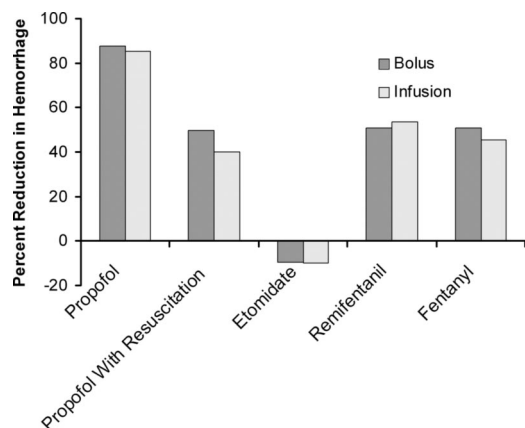


Fig. 1. The reduction in the dose to achieve a given drug effect in animals with hemorrhage, compared to control animals, based on simulations using the pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic models described in references 3–7.

propofol is a particularly poor choice for induction of anesthesia in patients with shock even after adequate fluid resuscitation. Even with adequate fluid resuscitation, propofol remains substantially more potent in patients with hemorrhage. In marked contrast, the potency of etomidate is nearly unchanged in shock. Thus, etomidate may be the drug of choice for anesthetic induction in patients with recent hemorrhage, even after adequate fluid resuscitation.

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Dexmedetomidine: Another Arrow for the Clinician's Quiver

ALPHA₂-adrenergic receptor agonists, as a class of compounds, have been widely used as adjuncts in the perioperative period to exploit their sedative/hypnotic, analgesic, anxiolytic, and sympatholytic properties for the benefit of surgical patients.^{1–3} In this issue of ANESTHESIOLOGY, Ramsay and Luterman have provided three interesting case reports involving the use of high doses of the alpha₂-adrenoceptor agonist, dexmedetomidine, as a sole agent for anesthesia.⁴ The rationale for this new,

off-label use of dexmedetomidine is based on known properties of alpha₂-agonists to provide analgesia^{5–7} while avoiding depression of respiratory function.^{2,8–10} In all three cases, airway control or ventilatory dysfunction was an issue of concern. That dexmedetomidine could be used for general anesthesia had been alluded to by Ebert *et al.*,² who earlier demonstrated that two volunteers who received a targeted infusion to a concentration of 8 ng/ml could not be aroused. Although Ramsay and Luterman have reported successful results from the use of dexmedetomidine in high doses for surgical procedures, several caveats need to be highlighted if the application of this technique is to be more commonly applied to select patients. There are potential side effects of large concentrations of dexmedetomidine that could result in undesirable effects on the cardiovascular system. A brief review of the attributes of dexmedetomidine seems warranted.

The alpha₂-receptors are involved in regulating the autonomic and cardiovascular systems. Alpha₂-receptors are located on blood vessels, where they mediate vaso-

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temic blood pressures. In healthy patients with intact baroreflexes, this can lead to bradycardia. Reflex bradycardia in conjunction with the vagal mimetic property of alpha₂-agonists could lead to severe bradycardia or asystole. In the three case reports from Ramsay and Luterma describing the use of high doses of dexmedetomidine in surgical patients, decreases, rather than increases, in blood pressure were noted. Perhaps in an older population, the alpha₂-receptor vascular effects of dexmedetomidine are diminished. Nonetheless, a second caveat with administering high doses of dexmedetomidine is to be wary of increases in blood pressure and excessive slowing of heart rate.

Although both Ebert *et al.*² and now Ramsay and Luterma⁴ have described the possible monotherapeutic application of alpha₂-agonists to provide an anesthetic state suitable for general anesthesia, it is much more likely that this class of compound will be used in combination with other anesthetic adjuvants in the perioperative period. Clinical studies in humans have validated the long-practiced veterinary anesthetic technique of combining alpha₂-agonists with ketamine to obviate both the cardiostimulatory and psychomimetic effects of the latter drug.²² Furthermore, combining alpha₂-agonists with opiate narcotics or nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs can enhance the analgesic efficacy without increasing the respiratory depressant effect of the latter. Past studies have revealed that the dose of many induction and maintenance agents for anesthesia can be significantly reduced when combined with alpha₂-agonists without adverse effects.²³

Ramsay and Luterma's interesting series of cases provides another arrow in the quiver of clinicians for the management of surgical patients with compromised airways. We anticipate further comparative studies to establish the clinical role of dexmedetomidine in difficult airway algorithms.

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