



UPDATE IN ANAESTHESIA



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EDITORIAL

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The safety of patients undergoing anaesthesia depends on a number of factors, the most vital of which is a trained anaesthetist with the patient at all times.

Clinical monitoring by the anaesthetist includes movement of the reservoir bag, colour of the lips and tongue, observation of the airway and pattern of respiration, strength and nature of the pulse, quality of the heart sounds and the blood pressure reading. These signs have been used for many years, and in many countries continue to be the only monitoring available during anaesthesia and surgery.

Over the past ten years equipment for monitoring patients during anaesthesia has improved dramatically and at the same time, mortality resulting from anaesthesia has decreased substantially. It is clear that the information provided by these monitors supplements in a most valuable way the senses of the anaesthetist. Of all the monitors developed there is no doubt that the most useful is the pulse oximeter. Early detection of hypoxia and inadequate oxygen delivery has saved many lives and it is hoped that eventually every anaesthetist will have access to a pulse oximeter. Unfortunately, at present, most pulse oximeters cost over £1000, well beyond the budget of many hospitals. If prices fall, then their use should become more widespread.

It is clear that modern technology, when available, has the potential to increase the safety and quality of our anaesthetics. Nevertheless it is not the presence of monitoring machinery which makes an anaesthetic safe, but the presence of a well-trained alert anaesthetist - and such a person can produce high quality anaesthesia even in the absence of sophisticated machines. "Monitor" for us should be something we do, rather than something we have!

This article of Update contains advice on using monitoring equipment, along with a selection of other articles. We

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welcome letters in response to any of our articles and we are also delighted to receive requests for specific topics that readers would like to see covered. If you would like to contribute to Update please contact the editor by email (iain.wilson5@virgin.net) to discuss your suggestion.