

Determination of the Pharmacodynamic Interaction of Propofol and Remifentanyl during Esophagogastroduodenoscopy in Children

David R. Drover, M.D.,* Catherine Litalien, M.D.,† Vinit Wellis, M.D.,* Steven L. Shafer, M.D.,‡ Gregory B. Hammer, M.D.§

Background: Propofol is commonly used to anesthetize children undergoing esophagogastroduodenoscopy. Opioids are often used in combination with propofol to provide total intravenous anesthesia. Because both propofol and remifentanyl are associated with rapid onset and offset, the combination of these two drugs may be particularly useful for procedures of short duration, including esophagogastroduodenoscopy. The authors previously demonstrated that the median effective concentration (C_{50}) of propofol during esophagogastroduodenoscopy in children is 3.55 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$. The purpose of this study was to describe the pharmacodynamic interaction of remifentanyl and propofol when used in combination for esophagogastroduodenoscopy in pediatric patients.

Methods: The authors studied 32 children aged between 3 and 10 yr who were scheduled to undergo esophagogastroduodenoscopy. Propofol was administered *via* a target-controlled infusion system using the STANPUMP software based on a pediatric pharmacokinetic model. Remifentanyl was administered as a constant rate infusion of 25, 50, and 100 $\text{ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$ to each of three study groups, respectively. A sigmoid E_{max} model was developed to describe the interaction of remifentanyl and propofol.

Results: There was a positive interaction between remifentanyl and propofol when used in combination. The concentration of propofol alone associated with 50% probability of no response was 3.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, 0.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$), and this was decreased to 2.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, 0.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) when used in combination with remifentanyl.

Conclusion: A remifentanyl infusion of 25 $\text{ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$ reduces the concentration of propofol required for adequate anesthesia for esophagogastroduodenoscopy from 3.7 to 2.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$. Increasing the remifentanyl infusion yields minimal additional decrease in propofol concentration and may increase the risk of side effects.

BECAUSE of its desirable pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic properties, propofol is widely used for induction and maintenance of anesthesia in both adults and children. The pharmacokinetics of propofol are characterized by a rapid distribution into peripheral tissues as

well as rapid clearance. This results in a rapid decrease in plasma propofol concentration after the infusion is terminated.¹⁻³ The pharmacodynamic properties of propofol include early return of alertness and decreased nausea and vomiting.^{4,5} As a result, propofol is appropriate for intravenous anesthesia for outpatient procedures, including esophagogastroduodenoscopy. In clinical practice, propofol is commonly combined with an opioid to produce complete anesthesia while substantially reducing the propofol dose.⁶⁻⁸

Because remifentanyl, like propofol, is associated with rapid onset and offset, the combination of propofol and remifentanyl may be particularly useful for procedures of short duration, including esophagogastroduodenoscopy. Nevertheless, appropriate dosing regimens for the combination of propofol and remifentanyl in children have not been characterized. Accordingly, we conducted this study to describe the pharmacodynamic interaction of remifentanyl and propofol when used in combination for esophagogastroduodenoscopy in pediatric patients.

Materials and Methods

Clinical Trial Design

After approval was obtained by the institutional review board (Stanford University, Stanford, California) and written, informed consent was obtained from parents, we studied 32 children aged between 3 and 10 yr who were scheduled to undergo esophagogastroduodenoscopy. This age range was selected because propofol pharmacokinetics have been published for this pediatric population.⁹ Exclusion criteria were lack of informed consent; allergy to propofol; obesity (weight for height > 95th percentile)¹⁰; and significant cardiac, metabolic, hepatic, or renal disease. All patients received nothing per mouth according to the Department of Anesthesia guidelines (≥ 8 h for milk/solid food, ≥ 3 h for clear liquids). No premedication was administered. Lidocaine and prilocaine cream (EMLA[®]; AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, Wilmington, DE) was applied to the skin of upper or lower extremity sites to facilitate placement of an intravenous catheter before administration of propofol. No topical pharyngeal anesthesia was used.

All patients were monitored with continuous electrocardiography and pulse oximetry. Noninvasive blood pressure measurements were made at 1- to 2.5-min intervals throughout the study period. Oxygen (2 l/min) was administered *via* nasal cannula beginning just before or immediately after initiation of propofol infusion,

* Assistant Professor of Anesthesia, Stanford School of Medicine. † Clinical Assistant, Department of Pediatrics, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Quebec, Centre Hospitalier de l'Université Laval, Quebec, Canada. ‡ Professor of Anesthesia, Department of Anesthesia, Stanford School of Medicine. § Adjunct Professor of Biopharmaceutical Science, University of California at San Francisco, San Francisco, California. ¶ Associate Professor of Anesthesia and Pediatrics, Stanford School of Medicine.

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Address reprint requests to Dr. Drover: Department of Anesthesia, Stanford University School of Medicine, 300 Pasteur Drive, Stanford, California 94305-5640. Address electronic mail to: ddrover@leland.stanford.edu. Individual article reprints may be purchased through the Journal Web site, www.anesthesiology.org.

Table 1. Patient Demographics, Assigned Group, Remifentanyl and Propofol Dose and Response/No Response Result Data

Patient No.	Group	Age, yr	Weight, kg	Remifentanyl, ng · kg ⁻¹ · min ⁻¹	Propofol, µg/ml	Response/No Response
1	1	8	33	0	1.0	R
2	1	4	20	0	1.25	R
3	1	8	23.5	0	1.60	R
4	1	10	52.8	0	2.0	R
5	1	9	29.1	0	2.5	R
6	1	10	27.7	0	3.2	R
7	1	4	12.3	0	4.0	R
8	1	10	25	0	5.0	NR
9	1	9	31.7	0	4.0	NR
10	1	6	19.9	0	3.2	NR
11	1	5	19.2	0	2.5	R
12	1	3	9.7	0	3.2	R
13	2	9	24.7	25	2.0	R
14	2	6	21.5	25	2.5	R
15	2	10	57.4	25	3.2	NR
16	2	10	26.6	25	2.5	R
17	2	4	16.5	25	3.2	NR
18	2	9	28.1	25	2.5	R
19	2	8	27	25	3.2	NR
20	3	9	52.2	50	2.5	R
21	3	9	31.4	50	3.2	NR
22	3	8	25.5	50	2.5	R
23	3	7	22.2	50	3.2	NR
24	3	9	48.6	50	2.5	NR
25	3	8	22.7	50	2.0	R
26	3	9	28.8	50	2.5	R
27	4	10	21.2	100	2.5	R
28	4	8	54.5	100	3.2	NR
29	4	10	30	100	2.5	NR
30	4	8	29	100	2.0	R
31	4	10	25.4	100	2.5	R
32	4	3.5	15	100	3.2	R

Group number denotes the dose of remifentanyl. All responses were patient movement.

NR = no response; R = response (see text for definition of response).

depending on patient cooperation. All episodes of bradycardia (heart rate < 80% of baseline), tachycardia (heart rate > 120% of baseline), hypotension (blood pressure < 80% of baseline), hypertension (blood pressure > 120% of baseline), and oxygen desaturation (SpO₂ < 94%) were recorded.

Patients were enrolled into four groups in a consecutive manner. Group 1 patients were given anesthesia with propofol as the sole anesthetic agent. Groups 2, 3, and 4 were given anesthesia with a combination of propofol and remifentanyl. The dose of remifentanyl for groups 2, 3, and 4 was a constant rate infusion of 25, 50, and 100 ng · kg⁻¹ · min⁻¹, respectively. Propofol was administered *via* a target-controlled infusion system using the STANPUMP software^{||} based on a pediatric pharmacokinetic model.⁹ Because the median effective concentration (C₅₀) of propofol in the presence of remifentanyl was not known, the sample size for each group was calculated using the up-and-down experimental design described by Dixon.¹¹⁻¹³ For purposes of this study, a patient was considered to have no response to

stimuli if there was minimal movement and the heart rate and blood pressure remained at 120% of baseline or less during the procedure. Patients who moved excessively, *i.e.*, requiring more than gentle restraint, or who manifested heart rate and blood pressure greater than 120% of baseline were considered to have had a response to stimuli. The study was terminated as soon as excessive movement or increase of heart rate and blood pressure were noted, and the propofol infusion was increased at the discretion of the anesthesiologist.

Group 1 (propofol only) was completed first. These results have been published.¹⁴ The target plasma propofol concentration for the first patient studied in group 1 was 1.0 µg/ml. The target plasma propofol concentration for each subsequent patient was determined by the response of the previous patient. If a patient was adequately anesthetized (*i.e.*, had no response to stimuli), the target plasma propofol concentration for the subsequent patient was decreased by 0.1 log interval. If a patient had a response to stimuli, the target plasma propofol concentration for the subsequent patient was increased by 0.1 log interval (table 1). Taking into consideration the results of the analysis of group 1, the

^{||} STANPUMP. Available at: <http://anesthesia.stanford.edu/pkpd>. Accessed September 14, 2003.

target plasma propofol concentration for the first patient in group 2 was 2.0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ and in groups 3 and 4 was 2.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$; subsequent concentrations were determined as described above for group 1.

To allow for equilibration between plasma and effect compartment, the propofol and remifentanyl infusions were initiated 5 min before insertion of the endoscope (Olympus GIF P140 or GIF XQ140 endoscope; Olympus, Tokyo, Japan). Propofol was given by a target-controlled infusion to rapidly attain the desired plasma concentration of propofol and to provide an induction of anesthesia comparable to routine practice. In contrast, remifentanyl was given by a fixed rate infusion to avoid a "bolus effect" of this potent opioid and because remifentanyl effect concentration reaches equilibrium rapidly. The propofol and remifentanyl infusions were started simultaneously.

Deriving the Interaction from the Study Data

The clinical effects of an individual anesthetic drug may be described by relating drug effect (E) to drug concentration (C) using a sigmoid mathematical model:

$$E = E_0 + (E_{\text{max}} - E_0) \frac{C^\gamma}{C_{50}^\gamma + C^\gamma}, \quad (1)$$

where E_0 is the baseline effect, E_{max} is the maximal drug effect, C is the drug concentration, C_{50} is the drug concentration that produces 50% of maximal effect, and γ describes the sigmoidicity of the relation. When the drug concentration is altered and a clinical response is measured, this allows for estimation of a single sigmoid curve to characterize the relation between drug concentration and drug effect. When more than one drug is administered to produce an anesthetic effect, as in clinical practice, multiple sigmoid curves can be generated for each concentration of a particular drug.^{15,16} Propofol and remifentanyl were infused together to produce the measured anesthetic endpoint, which is "response" or "no response" to the stimulus of the procedure. Several pharmacodynamic models were considered to first determine whether there was a significant interaction between the two drugs; subsequently, models were considered that would best characterize the interaction between the two drugs. The basic models considered were a simple sigmoid E_{max} model as described above for all data, multiple sigmoid curves for each concentration of remifentanyl, and a surface response interaction model.¹⁶ The above equations were implemented into NONMEM version V (NONMEM Project Group, University of California, San Francisco, California) such that response data with estimated plasma concentrations and infusion rates were analyzed by nonlinear regression. The pharmacodynamic parameters were estimated using a first-order method with likelihood estimation. SEs were calculated by NONMEM with the parameter estimates.

Best fits to the data were assessed using the NONMEM log likelihood (likelihood ratio test); the P value was calculated from the chi-square distribution.

Results

Thirty-two subjects aged 3–10 yr were enrolled, and all subjects completed the study protocol. No patient had bradycardia or hypotension. Three patients in group 4 (100 $\text{ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$) had oxygen desaturation and required positive pressure ventilation before insertion of the endoscope. All three patients improved with stimulation (e.g., jaw thrust) and insertion of the endoscope. The patient demographics, group number, propofol and remifentanyl doses, and response/no response measurements are included in table 1. All responses of the subjects were movement responses; hemodynamic variables always remained within 120% of baseline.

When all propofol and remifentanyl data, taken together, were initially analyzed with a simple model, the fit was significantly different ($P < 0.05$) than when the propofol group was fit separately. This difference showed that when remifentanyl was present, the 50% effect concentration was different than when propofol was used alone, and the quality of the fit was not as good when only one value for the 50% effect concentration was assumed. Sigmoid curves were then fit for each of the four groups; although the remifentanyl curves were different from the propofol sigmoid curve, they were not significantly different ($P > 0.05$) from each other. The data were fit again using four groups: the first group as propofol alone and the second group as propofol with all doses of remifentanyl. The fit to the data with two curves was significantly improved compared with previous models. The steepness (γ) of the two curves, propofol alone *versus* propofol plus remifentanyl, was not significantly different ($P > 0.05$). Thus, the two curves were fit simultaneously with one parameter for the steepness (γ). The data were further fit using a surface response interaction model with the four patient groups entering into the model. Although the interaction model revealed a significant synergistic interaction based on SE criteria, the model was not significantly ($P > 0.05$) superior to the model with a single curve for propofol and another curve for all remifentanyl groups together.

From the fit of the best model, the concentration of propofol alone associated with 50% probability of no response was 3.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, 0.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$), and the concentration of propofol associated with 50% probability of no response when used with remifentanyl was 2.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, 0.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$). Figure 1 shows the sigmoid curves for propofol alone and for the combination of remifentanyl and propofol. The steepness parameter was very steep (11.2; SE, 3.6), which is typical of the intravenous anesthetics and represents the rapid transition from inadequate to adequate anesthesia as the dose of these drugs is increased.

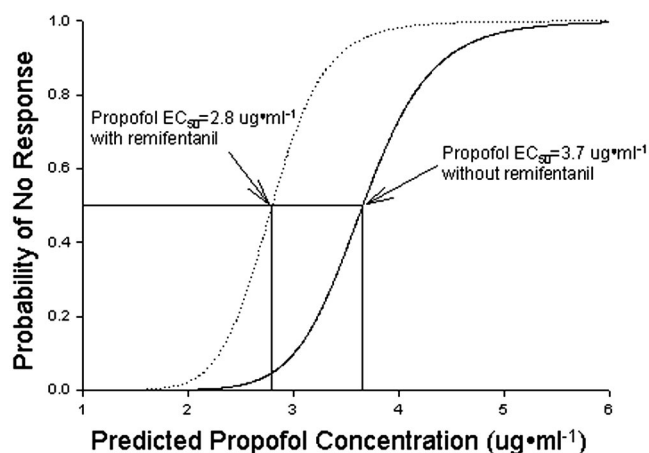


Fig. 1. The probability of response curves for propofol when used alone and when used with remifentanyl.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the pharmacodynamic interaction of remifentanyl and propofol when used in combination for esophagogastroduodenoscopy in pediatric patients. Because of episodes of respiratory depression requiring assisted ventilation with a remifentanyl dose of $100 \text{ ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$, a starting dose of $25 \text{ ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$ may be more appropriate. There was a pharmacodynamic interaction between remifentanyl and propofol such that using remifentanyl decreased the EC_{50} of propofol from $3.7 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ when used alone to $2.8 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ when used with remifentanyl. Doses of remifentanyl above $25 \text{ ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$ did not improve interaction with propofol and would not be recommended in this setting.

In clinical practice, propofol is usually combined with an opioid to produce complete anesthesia. Because of its favorable pharmacokinetic properties, including rapid onset, rapid equilibration between plasma and effect site concentrations, and rapid offset, remifentanyl is well suited for use in ambulatory surgery.^{17,18} Remifentanyl reduces the propofol plasma concentrations associated with loss of consciousness and response to surgical stimulation.^{6,19} The use of remifentanyl with propofol for ambulatory anesthesia and the dose-sparing effect of remifentanyl on propofol in adult patients have been previously described.²⁰ A study in spontaneously breathing adult patients receiving propofol infusions for ambulatory surgery noted decreased responses to surgical stimuli with increased doses of remifentanyl.²¹ However, the interaction of propofol and remifentanyl has not been studied in pediatric patients.

We used target-controlled infusions of propofol for induction and maintenance of anesthesia to rapidly achieve and then maintain a constant plasma concentration. Propofol was infused with a target-controlled infusion device and the STANPUMP software, using a

pediatric pharmacokinetic model for children aged between 3 and 11 yr.⁹ Because administration of remifentanyl results in rapid equilibration with the effect site, use of boluses or target-controlled infusion may not be required because a static infusion rate allows a consistent concentration of remifentanyl in the effect site in 5 min.²²⁻²⁴ Although a steady state concentration is not obtained in 5 min, we timed the stimulus to occur at 5 min to improve consistency between patients while avoiding the undesired effect of an intravenous bolus of remifentanyl.

We previously demonstrated that the C_{50} of propofol during esophagogastroduodenoscopy in children is $3.55 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$.¹⁴ This previous report used Dixon's methodology¹¹⁻¹³ for the calculation of the C_{50} . The current analysis reports a C_{50} of $3.7 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ for the same data, which is a small and nonsignificant difference (based on SE) from that reported previously. The discrepancy can arise from a different method of analysis (Dixon's method *vs.* logistic regression) and the simultaneous fitting of the propofol data with the remifentanyl data using only one value for the steepness variable (γ).

For purposes of simplicity and to avoid the need for phlebotomy, we did not measure plasma concentrations of propofol or remifentanyl during this study. It is acknowledged that direct measurement of plasma concentrations may be desirable in a pharmacodynamic study because of pharmacokinetic variability between patients. A previous study of the interaction of propofol and remifentanyl, however, showed no difference in results regardless of whether plasma concentrations, predicted concentrations, or infusion rates were used in the calculations.²⁵ A pharmacokinetic interaction of propofol and remifentanyl has been noted, but this only seemed to affect the pharmacokinetics of remifentanyl given as a bolus dose.²⁶ Because remifentanyl was not given by bolus dose during this investigation, the interaction noted here was most likely solely a pharmacodynamic interaction.

In summary, we found that there was an interaction between remifentanyl and propofol when used in combination and that the 50% effective concentration of propofol was reduced from $3.7 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, $0.4 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) to $2.8 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (SE, $0.1 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$). Clinicians may wish to choose a starting remifentanyl dose of $25 \text{ ng} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$ to minimize episodes of oxygen desaturation because increasing the dose of remifentanyl does not diminish the propofol requirements and does increase the risk of opioid-related side effects.

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