

THE USE OF DRAMAMINE IN CONTROL OF POSTOPERATIVE NAUSEA AND VOMITING * †

ROBERT H. HUME, M.D., AND WARREN K. WILNER, JR., M.D.

Ann Arbor, Michigan

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NAUSEA and vomiting in the immediate postoperative period are frequently of much more concern than the operation. During the past years, this situation has been investigated and attempts made to alleviate this distress (1, 4, 10). Many drugs, such as nicotinic acid, cerium oxalate, sodium bicarbonate and pyridoxine, have been used with but minimal success (6, 7, 8).

Although little is known about the mechanism of this condition, the general belief is that nausea and vomiting are the external manifestations of stimulation of the central nervous system. The afferent stimuli appear to originate from two sources; vestibular stimulation mediated through the eighth cranial nerve (11), and gastrointestinal stimulation mediated through the vagus nerve (12). Hence, it is probable that postoperative nausea and vomiting is the result of stimulation of the vestibular organ as a result of either voluntary or aided movement of the patient, or irritation and stimulation of the gastrointestinal tract by the anesthetic gas or vapors, or both mechanisms.

After World War II, dramamine was used very effectively in the prevention and treatment of motion sickness. The rationale for this therapy was on the experimental basis that dramamine localizes vestibular stimulation to subcortical cerebral areas (11) and, therefore, prevents the appearance of the signs and symptoms of motion sickness (2, 3, 13).

Recently dramamine has been used in the treatment of postoperative nausea and vomiting (5). It is of this aspect that the present study was undertaken.

METHOD

Two hundred patients were studied; 100 served as controls and 100 were given the active agent, dramamine. No attempt was made to select the patients studied. The daily operation schedule was utilized and alternate cases were assigned to dramamine and to the control group. All age groups and almost all surgical procedures were in-

* The dramamine and control solutions were supplied through the courtesy of G. Searle and Company, Chicago, Illinois.

† From the Department of Surgery, and the Department of Anesthesiology, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

cluded. An intravenous injection was chosen to assure definite absorption of the drug. Before the induction of anesthesia, 50 mg. or 1 cc. of dramamine was given (each cubic centimeter of solution contained dramamine, 50 mg.; benzylalcohol, 5 per cent; ethyl alcohol, 10 per cent; propylene glycol, 50 per cent, and water, q.s.) or 1 cc. of the control solution, which was identical except that it lacked dramamine. This injection was repeated every four hours until the patient was returned to the floor from the recovery room some two to fourteen hours after the initial injection. While in the recovery room the patients were observed regularly, and their reactions recorded. A notation was made if the patient vomited. Vomiting was noted if the motions of emesis were made regardless of the volume of emesis. When the patients were returned to their wards, their postoperative course was summarized on the recovery sheet, and became a part of their chart.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows a decrease in the amount of nausea experienced by the patients who were given dramamine as compared with the control

TABLE 1
CORRELATION OF DRAMAMINE WITH DEGREE OF NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Agent Given	Total Cases	Nauseated						Vomited					
		None	Incidence	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe	None	Incidence	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe
Control	100	60	40	14	14	10	2	61	39	13	16	8	2
Dramamine	100	74	26	16	7	2	1	82	18	10	4	2	2

group. Of the patients who were nauseated in spite of the administration of dramamine, a number did not vomit. This is in contrast to the control group in which virtually all patients who were nauseated vomited. Also, table 1 shows that of the patients who did have vomiting with dramamine, the vomiting was of less severity as compared with the controls. Our results agree with those obtained by Rubin and Metz-Rubin (5) in their study on the use of dramamine for controlling postoperative nausea and vomiting. However, our control group does not coincide with the high incidence of nausea and vomiting in their control series. Because of this difference, we do not share the opinion held by Ruben and Metz-Rubin and others that dramamine is an effective drug in the control of postoperative nausea and vomiting.

In table 2, our cases have been divided into groups according to the type of anesthetic agent used. It may be noted that the incidence of nausea and vomiting is reduced in all but one group. The changes noted are not statistically significant, and therefore strengthen our opinion of the ineffectiveness of this drug as a routine measure. The

TABLE 2
CORRELATION OF ANESTHESIA WITH NAUSEA AND VOMITING *

	Type of Anesthesia	Control			Dramamine		
		Number of Cases	Nausea and Vomiting		Number of Cases	Nausea and Vomiting	
			Number	Per Cent		Number	Per Cent
A.	Spinal & regional block	1	0	0	5	0	0
B.	Pentothal-nitrous oxide-oxygen	29	5	18	26	2	8
C.	Avertin-nitrous oxide-oxygen	5	3	60	8	5	62
D.	Ether-oxygen with nitrous-oxide induction	32	18	56	28	9	32
E.	Ether-oxygen with nitrous oxide induction (endotracheal)	21	7	33	19	6	31
F.	Ether-oxygen with pentothal induction	12	7	58	14	4	29
G.	Total with Ether (summation of D, E, & F)	65	32	49	61	19	31

* The above percentages, when examined by the chi square analysis, are found to be of significance.

marked decrease in the incidence of nausea and vomiting when endotracheal nitrous oxide and ether was used is of interest. It would appear that in such cases less anesthetic vapor passes into the gastrointestinal tract and, therefore, less irritation and afferent vagal stimulation to the central nervous system result.

The various types of operation are evaluated in table 3. It is observed that although dramamine appears to be of little value in abdominal operations, it seems to be of definite value in neurosurgical procedures. We are unable to explain this marked difference, but believe that it is of some significance.

TABLE 3
CORRELATION OF OPERATIONS WITH NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Types of Operation	Control					Dramamine				
	Number of Cases	Nauseated		Vomited		Number of Cases	Nauseated		Vomited	
		Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent		Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Abdominal peritoneum opened	16	9	56	9	56	26	13	50	10	33
Extremities	16	1	6	1	6	22	2	8	1	6
Chest	3	2	67	2	67	4	1	25	0	0
Neurosurgical	15	10	67	10	67	11	1	9	1	10
Neck	9	5	55	5	55	10	4	40	1	10
Not classified	41	13				27	6			

On the basis of figures as yet incomplete, it was observed that as the duration of anesthesia is extended the incidence of nausea and vomiting increases (9). In such cases, the value of dramamine increases with the duration of anesthesia.

In no patient was an untoward reaction to dramamine noticed. The minor side effects of generalized sedation or an occasional irritation at the site of rapid intravenous injection were observed.

CONCLUSION

Postoperative nausea and vomiting were studied in 200 patients. A decrease in incidence and severity was observed when dramamine was used. Its greatest value was noted in neurosurgical procedures. The benefits derived from the use of dramamine increase with the duration of anesthesia. We do not believe from our work with this drug that it should be considered for the routine treatment of patients suffering from postoperative nausea and vomiting.

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