

CORRESPONDENCE

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Revised Label Regarding Use of Succinylcholine in Children and Adolescents: I

To the Editor:—We are greatly concerned by the recent drug warning* issued by Burroughs Wellcome Company regarding the use of succinylcholine in children and adolescents. We have known for years that succinylcholine can be a trigger for malignant hyperthermia, rhabdomyolysis, or catastrophic hyperkalemia. As referenced in this warning, this phenomena was documented as early as 1967.¹ The most recently cited reference is that of Rosenberg and Gronert,² which is a letter reviewing several cases of cardiac arrest in children following halothane and succinylcholine administration. The statement that appears in the new package insert, "except when used for emergency tracheal intubation . . . succinylcholine is contraindicated in children and adolescents," is irresponsible and defies logic. If we accept this contraindication as appropriate, then should we ban the use of halothane in children because the reports involve halothane and succinylcholine? If this same line of reasoning were followed, we would ban cephalosporins because there is a 10% cross-reactivity in patients allergic to penicillin, and we would ban barbiturates because they can induce a crisis in patients with undiagnosed porphyria.

We must not discard the baby with the bath water. Certainly, judgment must be exercised when choosing medications to maximize risk:benefit ratios. Does the administration of succinylcholine after intravenous pentothal carry the same risk as succinylcholine after halothane? Until we have other neuromuscular blocking agents with as favorable a pharmacokinetic profile, there will be situations in which the use of succinylcholine is highly desirable, even in the

nonemergent setting. We call upon Burroughs Wellcome and the FDA to reexamine their motives and to revise the new package insert. Give warning to the potential problems associated with succinylcholine, but remove the statement that succinylcholine is contraindicated in children and adolescents. It never has been, and publishing that statement does not make it so. Plaintiff's attorneys, however, may disagree.

Robert C. Morell, M.D.
Jeffrey M. Berman, M.D.
Roger I. Royster, M.D.
Patricia H. Petrozza, M.D.
Jeffrey S. Kelly, M.D.
David M. Colonna, M.D.
Department of Anesthesia
The Bowman Gray School of Medicine
Medical Center Boulevard
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27157-1009

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* Package Insert: Anectine (Succinylcholine Chloride) Injection, USP. Research Triangle Park, Burroughs Wellcome, 1993.

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