Conference Summary

Controversies in pain relief in anaesthesia

Introduction

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"Controversies in Pain Relief in Anaesthesia" was the title of the fourth annual conference organised by the Department of Anaesthesia, University of Calgary, held in Calgary, Alberta, on November 17, 1984.

The meeting began with a review of the anatomy and physiology of the epidural space by Dr. Sheldon H. Roth (Calgary). He then discussed the pharmacokinetics of local anaesthetics and opioids within the spinal canal.

Dr. G.A. Albright (Stanford) pointed out the cardiotoxic effects of bupivacaine, especially in high doses and concentrations. He warned that the obstetric patient is particularly at risk because of the physiologic changes of pregnancy. Dr. W.D.R. Writer (Halifax) described the careful, rational use of bupivacaine in obstetrics which should reduce the risks of complications of this potent local anaesthetic. He emphasised the need to limit the dose and concentration to a minimum while still providing adequate analgesia. The morning was concluded by a lively discussion between the two speakers, with participation and questions from the audience.

Dr. J.G. Glassford (Calgary) led off a two-part discussion on the merits of regional anaesthesia. He emphasised the benefits of regional anaesthesia in various medical conditions. Dr. J. Stock (Calgary) gave the anaesthetist's viewpoint, mentioning the benefit of postoperative analgesia but warning that all operating theatre personnel must be aware of the needs of the conscious patient.

Finally, Dr. K. Budd (Bradford, England) outlined the history of narcotic agonist-antagonists, starting with nalorphine. He described some of his own research on buprenorphine, emphasising the limited respiratory depression of this drug as dosages increase. He rounded off his talk with a discussion of opioid receptors, concluding the day by returning to the basic physiology of pain with which Dr. Roth started in the morning.

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