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The Multiple Inert Gas Elimination Technique (MIGET)



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Foreword

It is a special pleasure to write a foreword for this important book by my colleagues Susan Hopkins and Peter Wagner. There are several reasons for this. One is that Peter joined me at UCSD in 1970 and thus has been a colleague for 47 years. This may not be a record, but it has been an unusually rewarding relationship, and, especially in the early days, we cooperated on many projects. Susan has also been a valuable colleague and incidentally is a talented artist. Perhaps I should add that I have not seen quite so much of Peter recently because he has taken up multitasking and now runs a vineyard that produces grapes for what are expected to be exceptional wines.

But the main reason why this book gives me so much pleasure is that it describes an outstanding advance in understanding ventilation-perfusion (\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}) inequality in diseased lungs. \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} was my first love in respiratory physiology and still remains dear to me. The first paper that I ever published (in 1957) was on the measurement of \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} inequality from a single expiration, and oddly enough only a few years ago, we used the same technique to make measurements on astronauts in space. In the period during and after World War II, pulmonary gas exchange was a particularly exciting research topic. Two groups of investigators, Fenn, Rahn, and Otis in Rochester, NY, and Riley and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins, made extraordinary advances. I was so enamored that I spent a sabbatical year with Rahn. In those days, the only possible method of analysis was graphical, and Rahn and Fenn produced a softcover booklet with foldout graphs that was the bible for acolytes. The breakthrough came with the application of digital computing, and this volume is a splendid example of what this can do.

\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} inequality is a demanding area of analysis. The basic physiology is very simple: the gas exchange that occurs in any single lung unit depends solely on the ratio of ventilation to blood flow. But once one starts to consider \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} distributions, which typically occur in lung disease, the situation quickly becomes very complicated. The development of the multiple inert gas elimination technique has clarified many aspects of the abnormal gas exchange that occurs in patients with

lung disease and also in normal subjects under unusual physiological conditions. The book is not bedtime reading, but the serious student of pulmonary gas exchange will find it enormously stimulating. I believe that it will be a valuable reference book for many years to come.

La Jolla, CA, USA

John B. West

Preface

The multiple inert gas elimination technique (MIGET) was born in the early 1970s in John West's UCSD laboratory. Some 45 years later, we have thought to bring together in one place as much detail as we can about the method. Why now? It is the sobering thought that we are not immortal and that a lot of the technical information is hard to find, scattered as it is in the literature. It certainly requires a lot of searching, and even then, those not mathematically inclined would be in doubt as to the completeness of the descriptions. Our vision has therefore been to create a reference source that present and future users of MIGET can utilize to enhance their understanding of its theoretical and practical aspects. We also undertook the daunting task of reading and summarizing the world's literature on all aspects of the method, especially concerning its physiological and clinical applications, or at least the literature in the English language, but even there, we may have missed articles for which we apologize in advance.

While the book is certainly not light reading, each chapter has been written with the reader in mind—so that even if the detailed mathematics are set aside, the principles and approaches used hopefully make sense, especially coupled to the liberal use of figures. We begin with a short history and then move to the basic physiological principles underlying MIGET. These are the very same principles used some 70 years ago by our pioneering gas exchange predecessors—the principle that alveolar gas exchange for any gas follows simple laws of mass conservation. What follows are chapters on the mathematical equations required to make MIGET work: how we convert inert gas exchange data into the ventilation-perfusion distribution. A consideration of helpful physiological constraints that are integrated into the mathematics, a consideration of experimental error, and then a description of the physiological information content of MIGET are included.

The direction then changes to cover the practical laboratory aspects including a number of seemingly minor but yet very important technical issues associated with the core technology—gas chromatography. Coupled to this is a discussion of the data entry process which enables the inert gas concentrations to be processed to yield the ventilation-perfusion distribution.

Finally, we discuss how MIGET has been applied in hundreds of studies around the world to throw light on complex gas exchange processes in health and disease. To keep this section under control, we have grouped outcomes into logical topic areas and confined our editorial opinion on the findings in each case to major observations of likely mechanistic importance. The domain of research here has been extremely diverse—small and large animals (mammals, birds, reptiles), human health and disease, and exercise and environmental stresses—posing us a major challenge to be complete yet not endless.

While this final chapter shows that a great many people have contributed to the development and implementation of MIGET over the past 45 years, there are four individuals in particular without whom MIGET likely would never have been imagined, developed, or applied, and this book is dedicated to them: John West, who supported the development of MIGET for many years; Herb Saltzman (chief of the Duke University hyperbaric chambers), who spent a sabbatical with John in the early 1970s and whose discussions kick-started thinking about the use of inert gases to investigate ventilation-perfusion inequality; John Evans, a UCSD mathematics professor (and physician!) who understood our goals and was absolutely instrumental in writing computer programs that converted our amateurish data processing code into a rigorous, understandable procedure; and Harrieth Wagner, whose decades-long technical skill with the gas chromatograph made the difference between success and failure.

La Jolla, CA, USA

Susan R. Hopkins
Peter D. Wagner

Contents

1	Introduction and History	1
1.1	Rahn, Fenn, Riley, and Cournand (et al.)	1
1.2	Seymour Kety	7
1.3	Yokoyama and Farhi	8
1.4	Lenfant and Okubo	9
1.5	Kelman, Olszowka, and West	10
1.6	Saltzman, Kylstra, Cohen, and Overfield	11
	References	12
2	MIGET: Basic Physiological Principles	13
2.1	Inert Gas Retention at a Given \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Ratio	13
2.2	The Retention-Solubility Curve and Different \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Ratios	15
2.2.1	The Retention-Solubility Curve and \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Inequality	16
2.2.2	Choice of Gases to Use in Measuring the Retention Curve	18
2.2.3	Retention-Solubility Curves and the Four Causes of Hypoxemia	18
2.2.4	Retention and, Now, Excretion	22
2.2.5	The R–E Difference	25
2.3	The \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution	28
2.4	Parameters of the \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution	30
2.4.1	Moments	30
2.4.2	Shunt and Deadspace	33
2.4.3	Fractions of the Total Cardiac Output and Ventilation Within Each Decade of \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q}	34
2.4.4	Modality and Fractional \dot{Q} , \dot{V}_A in Each Mode	35
2.4.5	DISP, R; DISP, E; DISP, E*; DISP, R–E*	35

2.5	The Relationship Between the Retention/Excretion Curves and the Blood Flow/Ventilation Curves (\dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution) . . .	37
	Reference	52
3	Mathematical Underpinnings	53
3.1	Introduction	53
3.2	Multicompartment Versus Continuous Distributions	54
3.3	Smoothing as a Constraint Concept	55
3.3.1	How Do We Apply Smoothing to Solve Eqs. (2.23) and (2.24)?	56
3.3.2	The Key Issue: Solving the Equations to Derive the \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution	60
3.3.3	Additional Constraints on the Equation System	62
3.4	Error Propagation, Using Both R and E , and Weighting	64
3.4.1	More on Weighting	68
3.5	The Residual Sum of Squares	68
	References	70
4	Strengths and Limitations from a Mathematical Perspective	71
4.1	Fine Structure of the Distribution (Including Shunt Versus Very Low \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} regions; Deadspace Versus Very High \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} regions)	71
4.1.1	Lowest \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} and Shunt; Highest \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} and Deadspace	76
4.1.2	Minimal Detectable Mismatch	76
4.1.3	Modality	78
4.2	Limits on Information Content of MIGET: The Orange Slice Diagram	78
4.3	Effects of Random Error	86
4.3.1	Magenta Points	87
4.3.2	Green Points	89
4.4	Smoothing and Random Errors	91
	References	92
5	Physiological Information Content of MIGET	93
5.1	The \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution and Its Parameters	93
5.1.1	Visual Appearance of the \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Distribution	94
5.1.2	Modality of the Distribution	95
5.1.3	Summing Up of Fractional Ventilation and Blood Flow in Chosen Domains of the \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Spectrum	95
5.1.4	Central Moments	96
5.1.5	Direct Dispersion Indices	99
5.2	Diffusion Limitation of O_2 and CO_2 Exchange	101
5.3	Molecular Weight Dependence of Inert Gas Exchange	104
5.4	MIGET and the Role of Extrapulmonary Factors in Gas Exchange	105

5.5	MIGET and Mammalian Versus Avian Gas Exchange	106
	References	107
6	MIGET: Practical Aspects	109
6.1	Different Ways of Doing MIGET	109
6.2	Making Up a Solution of the Six Gases in Sterile Saline (or 5% Dextrose)	111
6.3	Preparing the Subject	114
6.4	Infusing the Inert Gas Solution Intravenously	115
6.5	Collecting Blood and Expired Gas Samples	117
6.6	Measuring Ancillary Variables Such as Ventilation, Cardiac Output, Temperature, Blood Gases, [Hb], Acid/Base Status, etc.	118
6.7	Analyzing the Blood and Gas Samples for Inert Gas Concentrations by GC	118
6.7.1	Gas Chromatograph	118
6.7.2	Inlet System	119
6.7.3	Column	119
6.7.4	Detectors	120
6.7.5	Running the GC and Putting Samples Through It	120
6.7.6	Expired Gas Sample Processing	121
6.7.7	Blood Sample Processing	122
6.8	Measuring Blood/Gas Partition Coefficients of the Gases by GC	125
6.9	Measurement of Random Error Levels in a GC System	129
6.10	Entering the Inert Gas Data and Ancillary Variables onto a Spreadsheet	129
6.11	Entering the Data from the Spreadsheet into the MIGET Software: Either in the Original DOS Format or Now Using a Windows GUI Environment and Running the MIGET Software	130
6.12	Looking at and Analyzing the Results: For Data Errors and Physiological Meaning—First, SHORT, Second, VQBOHR	136
6.13	Additional Issues Raised by Others, Technical Notes, etc.	137
6.13.1	Theoretical and Mathematical Issues	138
6.13.2	Conducting Airway Influences on MIGET	138
6.13.3	Series and Parallel Deadspace: Implications for MIGET	138
6.13.4	Mass Spectrometry Versus Gas Chromatography for Inert Gas Measurement	140
6.13.5	Inert Gas Solubility in Blood and Mixing of Blood in the Right Ventricle	140
6.13.6	Use of MIGET to Validate Other Techniques	141
	References	141

7	Review of the MIGET Literature	145
7.1	Introduction	145
7.2	Pulmonary Gas Exchange in Healthy Human Subjects and Animals	146
7.2.1	Assessing \dot{V}_A/\dot{Q} Mismatch in Normal Human Subjects and Animals	146
7.2.2	In Healthy Aging	146
7.2.3	With Exercise at Sea Level	147
7.2.4	Sex-Based Differences in Pulmonary Gas Exchange During Exercise	148
7.2.5	Gas Exchange During Exercise in Elite Athletes	149
7.2.6	High Altitude/in Hypoxia	152
7.2.7	High-Altitude Pulmonary Edema	155
7.2.8	With Hypoxic Pulmonary Vasoconstriction	156
7.2.9	With Hypocapnia and Hyperventilation	158
7.2.10	With Hypercapnia and Increased F_{ICO_2}	158
7.2.11	With Diamox	159
7.2.12	Altered Pulmonary Blood Flow, Blood Volume, or Hematocrit	160
7.2.13	Splenectomy in Animals	161
7.2.14	With Blood Substitutes	161
7.2.15	With Ultrasound Contrast Agents	161
7.2.16	With Head-Out Water Immersion	162
7.2.17	With High-Frequency Voluntary Ventilation	162
7.3	In Lung Disease	162
7.3.1	COPD	162
7.3.2	Asthma	166
7.3.3	Cystic Fibrosis	169
7.3.4	Pulmonary Fibrosis	170
7.3.5	During Exercise in Patients with Lung and Chronic Disease	171
7.3.6	Pulmonary Embolism and Pulmonary Hypertension	173
7.3.7	Consolidation and Atelectasis	177
7.3.8	Following Pneumonectomy	178
7.4	In Other Systemic Diseases	180
7.4.1	Liver Disease	180
7.4.2	Heart Failure	182
7.4.3	Obesity	182
7.4.4	Hemodialysis in Chronic Renal Failure	183
7.5	Children	183
7.5.1	Children with Normal Lungs	183
7.5.2	Children with Lung and Liver Disease	183
7.5.3	During Growth and Development	184

- 7.6 Anesthesia and Surgery 185
 - 7.6.1 Anesthesia in Humans 185
 - 7.6.2 Anesthesia in Nonhuman Species 188
 - 7.6.3 Before and After AV Malformation Surgery 188
 - 7.6.4 Orthopedic Surgery 189
 - 7.6.5 Coronary Bypass and Other Cardiac and Vascular Surgery 189
 - 7.6.6 Effects Associated with Laparoscopic Surgery 190
- 7.7 In Critical Care and Mechanical Ventilation 191
 - 7.7.1 Acute Lung Injury 191
 - 7.7.2 Basic Findings in the Critically Ill: Role of PEEP and Other Ventilator Strategies 192
 - 7.7.3 Early Changes in Gas Exchange 195
 - 7.7.4 Body Position and Gas Exchange 196
 - 7.7.5 Alternative Ventilator Strategies 196
 - 7.7.6 Systemically Administered Vasodilators 198
 - 7.7.7 Inhaled Vasodilators 199
 - 7.7.8 Mediators and Gas Exchange 200
 - 7.7.9 Summary 201
 - 7.7.10 In Lung Injury Arising from Smoke Inhalation 202
 - 7.7.11 Hyperoxia and Lung Damage: Surfactant Metabolism 203
 - 7.7.12 Following Head Injury 204
 - 7.7.13 In Sepsis 204
 - 7.7.14 In CPR and Resuscitation from Shock 205
- 7.8 In Comparative Physiology 206
 - 7.8.1 Birds 206
 - 7.8.2 Reptiles 207
 - 7.8.3 Mammals 210
- References 211
- Appendix A: Lopez and Wagner Reprint on Gas Chromatography 235**
- Appendix B: Short Program PDF 261**
- Appendix C: VQ Bohr Program PDF 285**