

and is technically more difficult but is still feasible. The presence of an anaesthetist is essential for assistance in monitoring the patient and administering additional sedation. This will obviously also allow the use of general anaesthetic if the need arises. The usually quoted reasons for why local anaesthetic is under used (Britain performs less procedures under local anaesthetic than Scandinavia, the USA or the Third World^{5,6}) are fear of failure, the time taken for induction, the fear of neurological complications and the unpopularity of having an awake patient.⁷ Clearly these objections can all be overcome by co-operation

between anaesthetist, surgeon and patient in a careful standardised approach.

Much damage was done by WR Stone in 1901⁸ when he wrote "The presence of an anaesthetist and his expertise can be dispensed with if cocaine be employed". We believe that surgeons and anaesthetists should adopt a more positive approach to local anaesthesia. Our experience has demonstrated that many major operations are technically possible under local anaesthesia which facilitates a far wider range of surgical procedures than is generally appreciated.

1 Koller C. On the use of cocaine for producing anaesthesia on the eye. *Lancet* 1884; 2: 990-2.

2 Caffee HH, Benfield JR. Data favouring biopsy of the breast under local anaesthesia. *Surg Gynecol Obstet* 1975; 140: 88-90.

3 Howard CB, Mackie IG, Fairclough J, Austin TR. Femoral neck surgery using a local anaesthetic technique. *Anaesthesia* 1983; 38: 993-4.

4 Dennison AR, Watkins RM, Ward ME, Lee ECG. Simple mastectomy under local anaesthesia. *Ann R Coll Surg Engl* 1985; 67: 243-4.

5 Scott DB. Maximum recommended doses of local anaesthetic drugs. *Br J Anaesth* 1989; 64: 373-4.

6 Reynolds F. Adverse effects of local anaesthetics. *Br J Anaesth* 1987; 59: 78-95.

7 Atkinson RS, Rushman GB, Lee AJ. Regional anaesthesia In: *A synopsis of anaesthesia*, 10th edn. Bristol: Wright, 1987; pp 593-6.

8 Stone WR. Cocainization of the spinal cord by means of lumbar puncture during labor. *Am J Obstet* 1901; 63: 145-55.

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