Repeatability of ventilatory function measurements in a population survey of 7 year old children

I agree with Drs N Chan and M Silverman (December 1989;44:1059) that the FEV₁ and FEV₁/FVC are more useful indices of lung function than the FEV₁ in children.

The FEV₁/FVC is a valid measure in both children and adults, whereas the FEV₁ is not a valid measure in many normal children, who expel the whole of the FVC in less than one second. Drs N Chan and M Silverman have pointed this to occur in 29% of their 120 healthy 7 year olds, and Dr D P Strachan (December 1989; 44:1059) found only 1.9% of his sample to contain wheezy children. In an earlier study of normal schoolchildren this occurred in about 20%.

The FEV₁, in such children is only another measure of the FVC.

For the above reasons the FEV₁/FVC rather than FEV₁ was chosen as the index of choice as an indirect measure of the maximum ventilatory capacity. Over the years my colleagues and I have found the FEV₁/FVC to be a useful index of lung function in respiratory medicine, and in the assessment of new remedies.

Since the advent of the Wright peak flow meter and later pocket size meters patients have been able to monitor their own behaviour and map out the many interesting patterns of asthma and assess the efficacy of treatments.

It is interesting but not surprising that the coefficient of variation (CV) for the pneumotachograph measurement of peak expiratory flow was lower in the wheezy children than the healthy children. Maybe the wheezy children had more instruction and practice in the manoeuvre? The low CV for both FEV₁ and PEF (Wright) is reassuring to those who have used these indices for many years.

M C S KENNEDY
Blachwood Hall
Endon, Stoke-on-Trent ST9 4AH


THORAX
1990;45:424

Botulism: a potentially common problem

Dr J M Shneerson's editorial (November 1989;44:901-2) on the potential for botulism to rear its ugly head in the last decade of the 20th century was timely and appropriate for Thorax.

In a recent eight case US-Israeli outbreak the index patient, an elderly woman with a history of cardiac insufficiency, had been buried before the diagnosis of botulism was suspected. Two other patients needed prolonged respiratory support. The culprit, salted whitefish purchased in New York City, was transported to Israel in the hand luggage of several Jews of Russian origin, for whom it was a delicacy.

With regard to Dr Shneerson's warning that vacuum packaging of foods provides ideal conditions for Clostridium botulinum to grow and produce its toxin, we suggested in our report that repackaging of the fish in plastic bags to prevent it from smelling might also have encouraged toxin production. Botulism was also reported recently in a passenger who had consumed a tainted prepackaged airline meal.

In pondering the causes of our international outbreak, we wondered whether the reduced jet cabin oxygen tension during a transatlantic flight might have been a contributory factor in allowing reproduction of this anaerobe. In any event, the causative organism is ubiquitous and botulism remains a danger in the jet age, demanding public education and vigilance by clinicians and public health officials.

PAUL E SLATER
Department of Epidemiology, Ministry of Health, Jerusalem, Israel


The current state of lung transplantation

Drs J Dark and P A Corris (September 1989; 44:689-92) stated that obliterative bronchitis is the most common cause of late morbidity and mortality in the recipients.

We have recently reported the suitability of a new contrast medium, Iotrolan (a water soluble non-ionic dimer), in selective bronchography via the fibroptic bronchoscope. Iotrolan is well tolerated, can be injected directly into the suction channel of the bronchoscope, and does not obscure bronchoscopic vision or interfere with further bronchoscopic procedures, such as transbronchial biopsy. In contrast, the standard bronchographic agent, Dionsol suspension, is difficult to instil into the bronchial tree via the fibroptic bronchoscope, it obscures bronchoscopic vision, and it is poorly tolerated, especially in patients with obliterator bronchitis. Selective bronchography via the fibroptic bronchoscope using Iotrolan should prove useful in the detection of obliterative bronchitis by showing its characteristic bronchographic features. In addition, the technique should also be helpful in detecting dehiscence or narrowing of the airway anastomosis.

S K MORCOS
Northern Respiratory Centre, Royal Hospital, Sheffield S 14 7 AU


AUTHORS' REPLY Dr Morcos suggests that the extremely effective method of performing bronchography with water soluble contrast media might be useful in detecting obliterator bronchitis or anastomotic problems in the airway. We are in no doubt that the techniques he suggests would indeed show the severe abnormalities in end stage obliterator bronchitis. Unfortunately, the disease would be irreversible at this point and what is needed is an investigation which would identify the very early stages. We are already in a position to detect small airways obstruction physiologically and correlate this with submucosal lymphocyte infiltration in transbronchial biopsy specimens. The most important step will be to detect these changes non-invasively at a stage when they can be reversed by immunosuppression. We suspect that contrast radiography would not give enough early information.

PA CORRIS
Regional Cardiothoracic Centre, Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7DN


The current state of lung transplantation

Drs J Dark and P A Corris (September 1989; 44:689-92) stated that obliterative bronchitis is the most common cause of late morbidity and mortality in the recipients.

We have recently reported the suitability of a new contrast medium, Iotrolan (a water soluble non-ionic dimer), in selective bronchography via the fibroptic bronchoscope. Iotrolan is well tolerated, can be injected directly into the suction channel of the bronchoscope, and does not obscure bronchoscopic vision or interfere with further bronchoscopic procedures, such as transbronchial biopsy. In contrast, the standard bronchographic agent, Dionsol suspension, is difficult to instil into the bronchial tree via the fibroptic bronchoscope, it obscures bronchoscopic vision, and it is poorly tolerated, especially in patients with obliterator bronchitis. Selective bronchography via the fibroptic bronchoscope using Iotrolan should prove useful in the detection of obliterative bronchitis by showing its characteristic bronchographic features. In addition, the technique should also be helpful in detecting dehiscence or narrowing of the airway anastomosis.

S K MORCOS
Northern Respiratory Centre, Royal Hospital, Sheffield S 14 7 AU


AUTHORS' REPLY Dr Morcos suggests that the extremely effective method of performing bronchography with water soluble contrast media might be useful in detecting obliterator bronchitis or anastomotic problems in the airway. We are in no doubt that the techniques he suggests would indeed show the severe abnormalities in end stage obliterator bronchitis. Unfortunately, the disease would be irreversible at this point and what is needed is an investigation which would identify the very early stages. We are already in a position to detect small airways obstruction physiologically and correlate this with submucosal lymphocyte infiltration in transbronchial biopsy specimens. The most important step will be to detect these changes non-invasively at a stage when they can be reversed by immunosuppression. We suspect that contrast radiography would not give enough early information.

PA CORRIS
Regional Cardiothoracic Centre, Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7DN

