The Effect of Clonidine Premedication on Postoperative Agitation

Clonidine is used primarily to produce a decreased heart rate and blood pressure for the management of hypertension. However, it also has both sedative and analgesic effects. Postoperative agitation following strabismus surgery can be alarming to parents because they often interpret their child’s behavior as representing pain instead. Therefore, the ability to reduce postoperative agitation will improve not only recovery, but also parent satisfaction in the postoperative setting.

In the article by Heinmiller et al. in this issue, although clonidine did increase the amount of time children spent apart in the post-anesthesia care unit because of lethargy, it also reduced postoperative agitation when given preoperatively. Even though their children remained in the post-anesthesia unit slightly longer in the group receiving preoperative clonidine, the parents were much happier not observing the post-anesthesia agitation. Many parents interpret the postoperative agitation as their children in pain instead of being disoriented. Further research documenting the cost-effectiveness of using preoperative clonidine in a large population of patients needs to be preformed.

Leonard B. Nelson, MD, MBA
Editor