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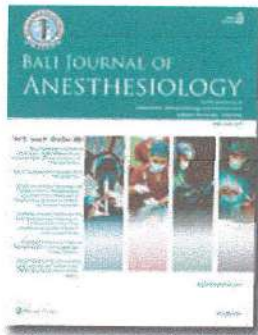
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## Table of Contents

Next Issue

Previous Issue



October-December 2021

Volume 5 | Issue 4

Page Nos. 223-293

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## REVIEW ARTICLES



**Blood transfusion and venous cannulation — medical publication and innovation across 350 years of history: A narrative review**  p. 223

Andre Van Zundert, Floris S S Wiepking, Michelle Roets, Tom Christophe R V Van Zundert, Stephen P Gatt  
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_39\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>



**Role of telemedicine in anesthesia: Are we ready yet?** p. 230

Seema Mishra, Raghav Gupta, Swagata Biswas

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_51\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>



**Post-spinal backache after cesarean section: A systematic review** p. 234

Tjahya Aryasa, Adinda Putra Pradhana, Christopher Ryalino, I Gusti Agung Gede Utara Hartawan

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_72\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES



**Introduction of direct observation of procedural skills as workplace-based assessment tool in department of anesthesiology: Evaluation of students' and teachers' perceptions** p. 239

Pooja R Mathur

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_59\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>



**Knowledge, attitude, and practices of Indian anesthesiologists regarding the comprehensive preanesthetic assessment of geriatric patients: A cross-sectional survey** p. 246



Pallavi Ahluwalia, Bhavna Gupta

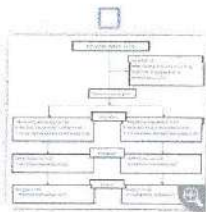
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_26\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Clonidine versus dexmedetomidine as premedication to intrathecal 0.5% bupivacaine: A randomized, double-blind, prospective study p. 252

Arvind Khare, Beena Thada, Laxmi Narayan Solanky, Veena Mathur, Deepak Garg, Pradeep Kumar

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_47\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

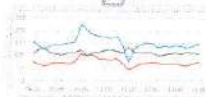
## CASE REPORTS



### Challenging anesthesia in pediatric pheochromocytoma and paraganglioma tumors p. 260

Putu Kumiyanta, Kadek Heryana Putra

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_67\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Airway obstruction by subcutaneous tissues growing into tracheal lumen below tracheostomy stoma: A case report p. 263

Indrajith Renjith, Ramalingam Revathi

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_45\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Anesthetic management of patients undergoing one-step surgical tracheoesophageal fistula: Case series p. 267

Desy Permatasari, Putu Kumiyanta, Tjokorda Gde Agung Senapathi

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_84\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Paradoxical heart rate response after atropine sulfate administration in total atrioventricular block complicating acute myocardial infarction: A case report p. 271

Dita Aulia Rachmi, Rina Yudha Novira, Eka Prasetya Budi Mulia, Andrianto Andrianto

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_76\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Challenges in management of severe COVID-19 in a post renal transplant patient co-infected with cytomegalovirus p. 275

Yashwanth Patnaik Rajamahanthi, Guriqbal Singh

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_78\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Emergency management of cyanotic spell in a COVID-19 suspect tetralogy of Fallot child p. 279

Rohan Magoon, Ili Shri, Jasvinder Kaur Kohli, Ramesh Chand Kashav

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_44\_21

[ABSTRACT] [HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

## LETTERS TO EDITOR



### The invisible frontrunner: Anesthesiologist 5.0 p. 282

Bambang Tutuko, Marilaeta Cindryani

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_27\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Target and goal mismatch during mechanical ventilation in COVID-19 patients p. 284

Amarjeet Kumar, Neeraj Kumar

DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_22\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

### Amisulpride for postoperative nausea and vomiting: A new answer to an old question p. 286

Rohan Magoon, Nitin Choudhary

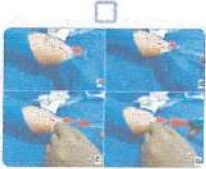
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_40\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

**U-Turn of suction catheter within i-gel during elective surgery: An unusual presentation** p. 288

Aniruddha Banerjee, Vijay Adabala, Mridul Dhar  
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_83\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

**Non-traumatic "saline flush stylet" technique as an alternative rescue approach in difficult peripheral arterial catheter insertion** p. 290

Mridul Dhar  
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_58\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

**Anesthetic drug repurposing: Laurels to anesthetic pharmacology** p. 292

Jasvinder Kaur Kohli, Rohan Magoon, Iji Shri, Ramesh Chand Kashav  
DOI:10.4103/bjoa.BJOA\_73\_21

[HTML Full text] [PDF] [Mobile Full text] [EPub] [Sword Plugin for Repository]<sup>Beta</sup>

# Paradoxical Heart Rate Response After Atropine Sulfate Administration in Total Atrioventricular Block Complicating Acute Myocardial Infarction: A Case Report

Dita Aulia Rachmi, Rina Yudha Novira<sup>1</sup>, Eka Prasetya Budi Mulia, Andrianto Andrianto

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## Abstract

Acute myocardial infarction is sometimes complicated by atrioventricular block. Advanced cardiac life support guideline for the treatment of atrioventricular block suggests early use of atropine. Atropine works as a parasympatholytic drug that enhances SA node automaticity and AV node conduction. We report a case of a male patient with inferior myocardial infarction and total atrioventricular block who showed a marked reduction in heart rate after first and second atropine administration, a paradoxical worsening of the block. Atropine has been associated with some adverse consequences, including proarrhythmic effect, worsening of the high-grade atrioventricular block, and worsening of the ischemic situation. In this case of total atrioventricular block caused by acute myocardial infarction, immediate revascularization can be the only required management. Awareness of this potential adverse reaction will help the clinician make a risk/benefit ratio consideration regarding the use of atropine for certain patients.

**Keywords:** acute myocardial infarction, case report, heart rate, total atrioventricular block

## INTRODUCTION

Acute myocardial infarction (AMI) is frequently complicated by atrioventricular block (AVB). There is a greater incidence of total AVB in inferior AMI (odd ratio = 2.59) than in anterior or lateral AMI.<sup>[1]</sup> Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) guidelines for the treatment of hemodynamically unstable bradycardia or AVB suggest the early use of atropine. Atropine works as a parasympatholytic drug that enhances sinoatrial (SA) node automaticity and atrioventricular (AV) nodes conduction by direct vagolytic action.<sup>[2]</sup> However, several reports have shown the potential adverse reaction of atropine when used in AVB complicating AMI. We report a case of a patient with inferior myocardial infarction and total atrioventricular block who showed a marked reduction in heart rate after atropine administration, a paradoxical worsening of the block.<sup>[3]</sup>

## CASE REPORT

A 67-year-old man patient presented to the emergency room with retrosternal chest pain for 3 h before admission. The pain radiated to the left shoulder and neck. Patient never had chest pain like this before. Prior history was suggestive for risk of cardiovascular disease. Patient had uncontrolled hypertension for 3 years and smoked excessively for 50 years. Physical examination showed irregular heart rate 58 beats/min, respiration rate 22 breaths/min, blood pressure 110/70 mmHg. Other systemic findings were within normal range. Electrocardiography

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(ECG) at admission showed ST elevation in inferior lead and total AVB (TAVB) with ventricular and junctional escape rhythm [Figure 1]. Posterior and right ventricle ECG did not show any significant findings. Elevated cardiac enzyme marker confirmed the diagnosis of myocardial infarction. Patient was diagnosed with inferior ST-Elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) with TAVB.

Oxygen, 320mg aspirin, and 300mg clopidogrel were given as initial therapy for acute coronary syndrome. Since the presentation was within the window period of 3h and the hospital did not have cardiac catheterization laboratory, reperfusion by fibrinolytic agent was chosen. Before fibrinolysis, 0.5mg atropine sulfate was injected to treat the bradycardia. The heart rate recorded soon after the first atropine administration was 38 beats/min. His heart rate became even slower, and chest pain worsened after second atropine administration (30 beats/min). We started continuous Dopamine infusion at 5 ug/kg/min, to which he responded well, increasing his heart rate and blood pressure. During and after the administration of 1.5 million IU streptokinase, the patient remained stable. Vital signs were normal during fibrinolysis [Table 1]. ECG post fibrinolytic and the following day showed complete resolution of AVB [Figures 2 and 3]. The patient was discharged on the sixth day of hospitalization.

## DISCUSSION

The pathophysiologic mechanisms that explain AVB events in AMI patients involve reversible ischemic injury

of AV nodes and increased parasympathetic influence. If AVB is caused by reversible ischemia injury on AV nodes, the patient tends to respond poorly to atropine therapy. Nevertheless, AVB caused by increased parasympathetic influence will be more likely to respond rapidly to atropine therapy. In most cases, after atropine administration, there would be either no alteration or improvement of clinical condition.<sup>[3]</sup>

In our case, 0.5mg dose of atropine was given twice. Instead of increasing, the heart rate became slower consistently soon after each administration. Initially, the heart rate was 58 beats/min and later became 30 beats/min after a total of 1 mg atropine injection. A case reported that 1 mg atropine was given to a patient with sinus rhythm and heart rate of 68 beats/min, and 30 min later, the patient developed 2:1 AV block.<sup>[4]</sup> Another reported a similar event where such intensification of AVB occurred after atropine administration in AMI patient.<sup>[5]</sup>

The occurrence of adverse events after atropine administration was quite rare. The adverse events ever documented so far other than worsening of AVB were proarrhythmic effects. Ventricular fibrillation and ventricular tachycardia were among arrhythmic complications that developed after atropine administration.<sup>[6]</sup> Another adverse event of atropine was potentiation of ischemic condition, which most likely happened in our case as the escape rhythm slowed down after atropine administration. A case reported by Brady

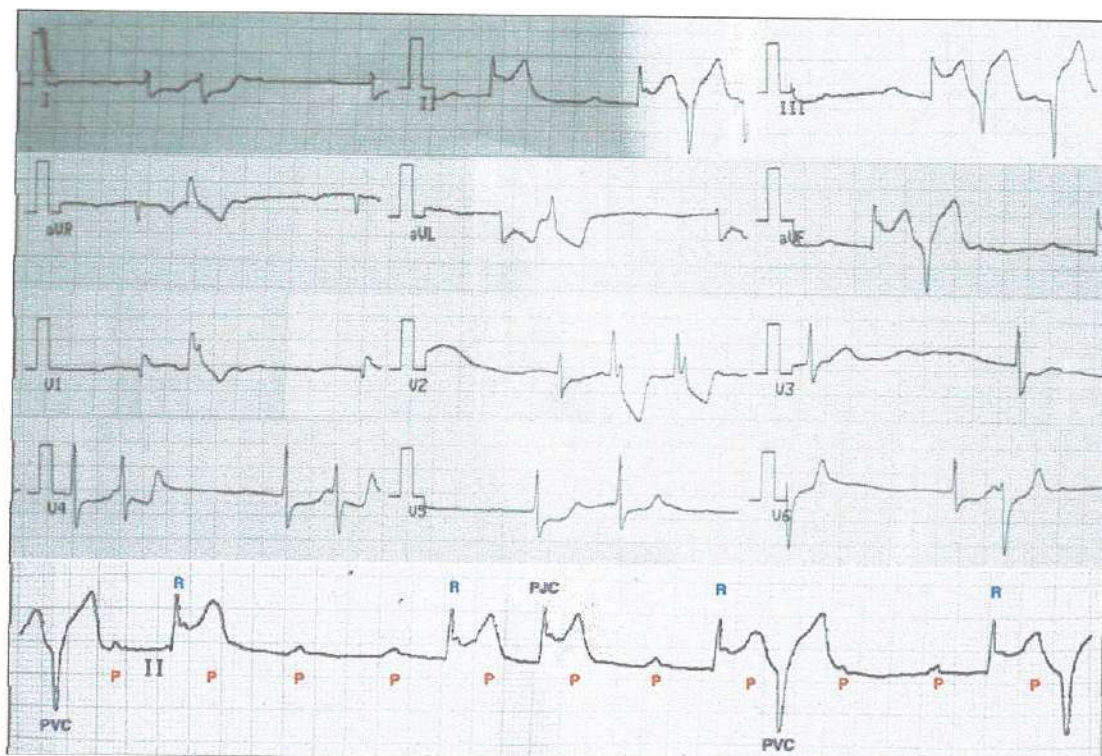


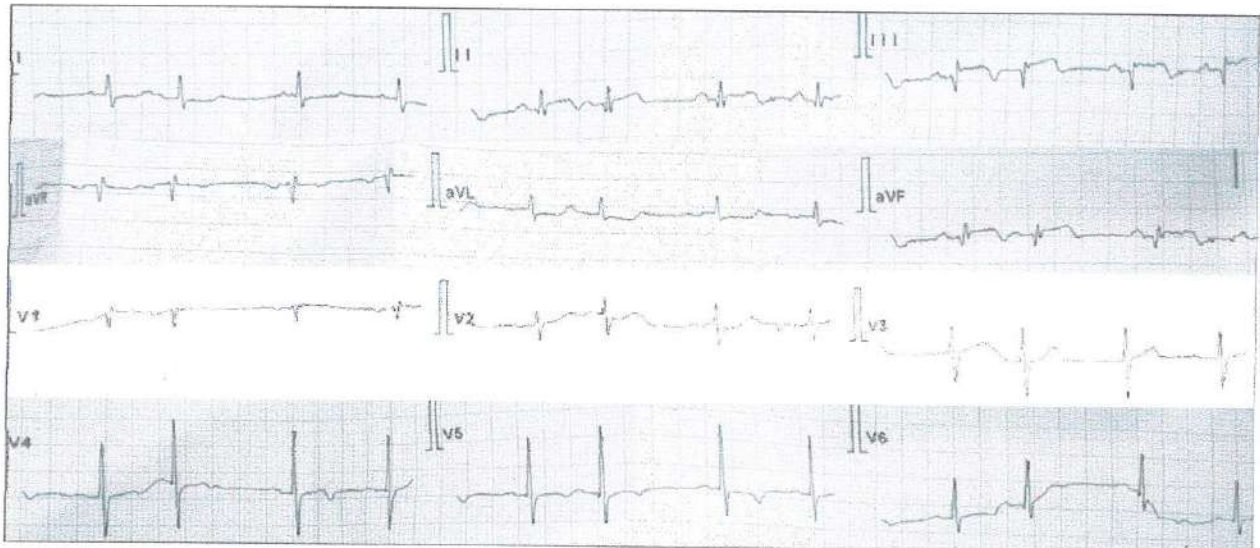
Figure 1: 12-lead ECG at arrival showed inferior myocardial infarction with total AV block with junctional escape rhythm and supraventricular and ventricular extrasystole



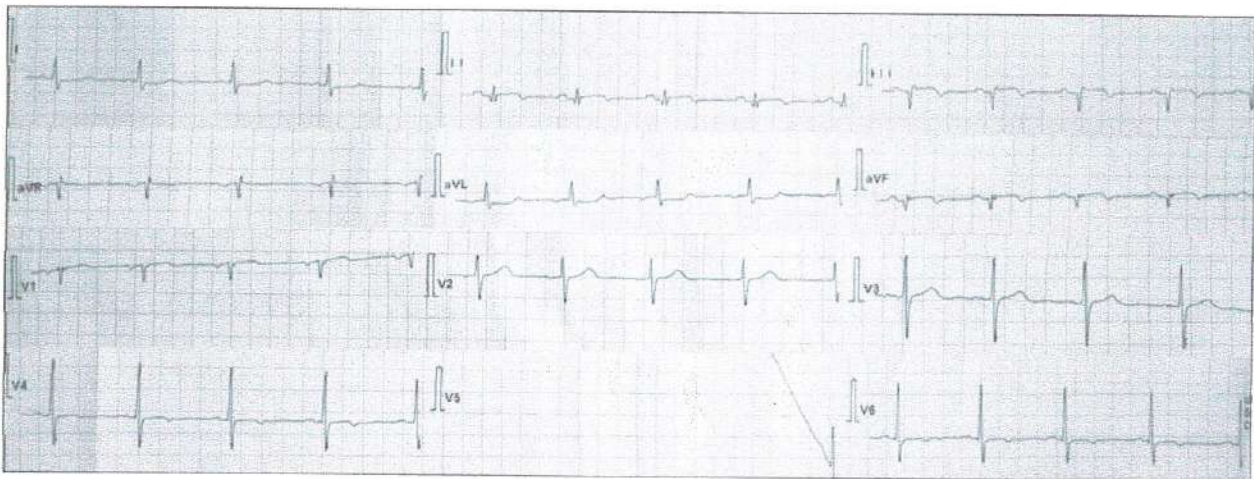
**Table 1: Vital signs during treatment in emergency department (ED)**

Time	Medication	BP (mmHg)	HR (beats/min)	RR (breaths/min)
12.30	Oxygen, IV access 12 lead ECG	110/70	58	20
13.00	320 mg aspirin PO 300 mg clopidogrel PO	110/70	56	20
13.15	0.5 mg sulfas atropine IV (I)	90/70	38	24
13.30	0.5 mg sulfas atropine IV (II)	90/60	30	24
15.00	Fibrinolytic by 1.500.000 IU Streptokinase IV	120/70	65	24

BP: blood pressure, HR: heart rate, PO: peroral, IV: intravenous, RR: respiration rate.



**Figure 2:** ECG recorded 1 h after fibrinolytic showed a reduction of ST-elevation and resolution of atrioventricular block and occasional supraventricular extrasystole



**Figure 3:** ECG obtained following days after fibrinolytic showed complete resolution of total AVB

also showed possible conversion of acute ischemia to AMI related to atropine administration.<sup>[5]</sup>

Recommended indications for atropine therapy include: (1) sinus bradycardia with hypoperfusion; (2) symptomatic type I second-degree AVB; (3) bradycardia and hypotension after administration of nitroglycerin; and (4) complete heart block at or above the level of AV nodes, i.e., a

narrow QRS complex.<sup>[3]</sup> In our case, the escape rhythm was a narrow QRS complex suggesting the block at or above the level of AV nodes. Paradoxical slowing of the heart rate after administration of atropine has been found rarely in patients with infranodal AV block—Mobitz Type II second-degree AV block and TAVB with a wide QRS complex.<sup>[3]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Atropine has been associated with a marked reduction in heart rate that shows paradoxical worsening of atrioventricular block. This case may involve such a patient. Therefore, atropine is indicated only if the patient showed signs of hypoperfusion or clinical deterioration. In our case of TAVB caused by acute myocardial infarction, immediate revascularization can be the only definitive management. An awareness of this potential adverse reaction will help the clinician to make a risk/benefit ratio consideration regarding the use of atropine in a particular patient.

## Authors' contributions

DAR and RYN equally contributed to data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and revised manuscript. EPBM contributed to data interpretation, literature review of the case, and manuscript drafting. AA contributed to the literature review of the case and manuscript drafting. All authors have read and approved the manuscript.

## Ethical approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

## Consent for publication

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for publication of this case report and accompanying images.

## Availability of supporting data

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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