Technical Section

TECHNICAL NOTES & TIPS

TECHNICAL TIPS

Distraction of the ankle joint during arthroscopy

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Traction during ankle arthroscopy provides optimum views of the joint space. A length of 6-inch crepe bandage is tied around the surgeon's waist. A Guhl ankle distractor foot strap (Smith & Nephew Inc., Andover, MA 01810, USA) is then clipped directly onto the crepe (Fig. 1). The surgeon can then apply more or less tension by simply leaning forwards or back. This is a simple, cheap and effective method for distracting the ankle joint during arthroscopy without the use of a distraction jig. It also reduces the risk of tearing drapes and, therefore, desterilising the operative field.

Figure 1 Illustration of the technique.

Pelvic surgery: water or saline wash?

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Figure 1 Operative field after water lavage.

Figure 2 Operative field after saline lavage.

Major pelvic surgery may be associated with significant bleeding. Deep in the pelvis, small bleeding vessels are often difficult to identify. Washouts with normal saline or water are often used to aid clarity of the surgical field. To the naked eye, water and normal saline are both clear in a transparent bottle. However, water remains clear when in contact with blood, thus aiding the identification of individual bleeding small vessels (Figs 1 and 2). This effect is not observed with normal saline which gives a cloudy appearance. Furthermore, water has the theoretical benefits of tumour cell lysis by osmosis during the wash.¹

Reference

1. Huguet EL, Keeling NJ. Distilled water peritoneal lavage after colorectal cancer surgery. *Dis Colon Rectum* 2004; **47**: 2114.

Avoiding the unsanitary hip spica

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Treatment of infants with hip dysplasia commonly involves application of a hip spica for several months. During this period, the spica invariably becomes heavily soiled around the perineal opening. Gore-tex® (WL Gore and Associates, Inc., Flagstaff, AZ, USA) cast liners have previously been shown to avoid skin excoriation

Figure 1 Hip spica (A) before and (B) after application of sanitary towels.

from soiled casts.¹ These cast liners are, however, expensive. We describe a simple, cheap, and replaceable alternative. Disposable adhesive sanitary towels are folded over the cast edges, with absorbent surfaces facing the perineum (Fig. 1). Towels can be changed by the infant's parents once soiled. We recommend a wingless ultra-thin towel for ease of application.

Reference

1. Wolff CR, James P. The prevention of skin excoriation under children's hip spica casts using the Gore-Tex pantaloons. *J Pediatr Orthop* 1995; **5**: 386–8.

Keeping it neat in vascular surgery

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For vascular operations where a drain is required postoperatively, a minor modification to standard technique can be used to enhance visibility. Further, small (~1 cm) incisions can be made proximal and distal to the wound and vascular clamps inserted through them. The clamps are then advanced into the operative field. Control of the inflow and outflow of the vessel is thereby obtained, the clamps' movement being limited by the tissues, thus removing the requirement for a towel clip or an assistant to

Figure 1 Hip spica (A) before and (B) after application of sanitary towels.