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Painful Pricks

Venepunctures, parenteral injections and various procedures including lumbar puncture, bone marrow aspiration and biopsies require penetration of skin. Skin pricks are a major source of pain and discomfort to infants and children. Little attention is paid to alleviate apprehension and pain. Physical force is used to restrain the child during the procedure and the parents are usually excluded. We are used to children crying for a variety of reasons and a short vocal and pulmonary exercise is not considered to have much adverse effect! It is not unusual to see several blood samples being taken in a day, whereas with some planning one venepuncture would have sufficed.

In many countries there is increasing concern over the physical and emotional pain caused by skin puncture while performing common procedures(I). A topical anesthetic preparation EMLA (eutectic

mixture of local anesthetic) has become available over the past two years. Its local application induces skin anesthesia making needle pricks painless. Unfortunately EMLA takes about one hour to be effective and therefore is of no help in urgent situations. However, it is being used for all planned procedures. Such a preparation needs to be introduced in India at a reasonable cost.

Because of overcrowding in hospitals and lack of time we often do not think of the child's comfort and parental anxiety. Still, a sympathetic and reassuring attitude should be adopted as far as possible.

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