

Combitube to the Rescue?

The Combitube might be a useful rescue device even when laryngeal mask airway and bougie have failed.

To help elucidate the possible role of the esophageal-tracheal Combitube as a rescue airway device, an investigator reviewed a database of emergency intubations performed by anesthesia personnel outside the operating room at a single hospital from 1995 to 2005.

Of 1004 intubations, 18 patients (1.8%, of whom 17 were male and 1 female) required insertion of a Combitube for rescue from failed intubation. Direct laryngoscopy (DL) had failed in all 18 patients.

Six patients had a Cormack-Lehane grade III view (epiglottis only), and 12 had a grade IV view (epiglottis not visible). In 1 patient, DL alone failed; in 3 patients, DL and use of a bougie failed; in 2 patients, DL, a bougie, and laryngeal mask airway (LMA) failed; and in 12 patients, DL and LMA failed.

All patients were unconscious due to illness or sedation, and 9 patients received succinylcholine.

The Combitube was placed successfully on the first attempt in 14 patients and on the second attempt in the remaining 4. Nine patients required an adjustment (moving the tube to a more proximal or distal location) to optimize ventilation. All patients were successfully ventilated to maintain oxygen saturation >92%. After ventilation was achieved, 11 patients were intubated tracheally with the Combitube in place; 2 patients could not be intubated, and the Combitube was switched to an intubating LMA; and 5 patients required surgical airway management to establish a definitive airway.

Comment: The Combitube and other retroglottic airways, such as the KING LT, are easily inserted and have a high oxygenation success rate in intact airways even when intubation has failed. One such airway device should be on the difficult-airway cart in every emergency department.

— *Ron M. Walls, MD, FRCPC, FACEP, FAAEM*

Published in Journal Watch Emergency Medicine November 9, 2006

CITATION(S):

Mort TC. Laryngeal mask airway and bougie intubation failures: The Combitube as a secondary rescue device for in-hospital emergency airway management. *Anesth Analg* 2006 Nov; 103:1264-6.