

No-Needle Anesthetic Appeals to Needle-Phobic Vasectomy Patients

Reducing Anxiety May Lead to More Vasectomies

by Theodore V. Benderev, M.D.

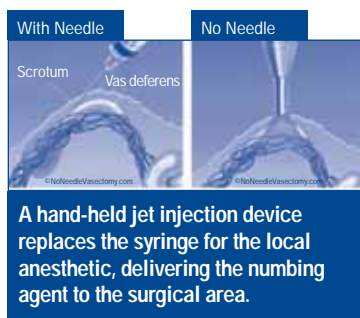
Every urologist recognizes that most men are moderately apprehensive about a vasectomy procedure. And while over 500,000 men decide to have this simple, safe procedure each year, many more men think about the idea, but steer away from a vasectomy for various reasons—some real and some imagined. In the United States, of the 1.5 million surgical permanent sterilization procedures, two-thirds are tubal ligation and only one-third are vasectomies. This is even more remarkable when one considers that in Canada the ratios are reversed.

There is a new technique that could dramatically increase vasectomies in the United States over the current favorite alternative of tubal ligation. This relatively simple technique is catching the attention of both patients and doctors, answering one of the classic objections about the vasectomy procedure—the needle. This new anesthetic delivery method removes what many men consider to be the most painful part of the vasectomy: the two needle sticks for delivery of the lidocaine. The availability of a no-needle anesthetic technique may decrease the fear of pain in men and enhance the popularity of vasectomy worldwide.

Jet Spray Device

Five thousand patients in the United States and Canada have already received a jet injection spray instead of the traditional needle to deliver anesthetic to the skin and underlying vasa. In 2001, Charles L. Wilson, M.D. initially described this technique for vasectomy in a letter of communication.

Although relatively new to vasectomy procedures, similar no-needle techniques are commonly used for anesthesia in dentistry and many other areas of medicine with wide acceptance by doctors and patients. According to physician experts, this



technique lowers patient fears, reduces pain, and simplifies procedures.

Research Study Reported

The findings of a study of 465 patients titled “No-Needle Jet Anesthetic Technique for No-Scalpel Vasectomy” was presented at the American Urology Association Annual Meeting this year in San Antonio, and was published in the *Journal of Urology* in May 2005. The paper describes a jet-injector device that produces almost instant anesthesia with an average total lidocaine dosage of only .6cc. The average visual analog scale score for the pain of the jet injection itself was 1.71 of 10. The average visual analog scale score for the pain of subsequent vasectomy during the surgical procedure was 0.66 of 10 (median 0.2). No patients experienced hematomas.

Doctors who described the technique and published their findings—Ronald S. Weiss, M.D. and Philip S. Li, M.D.—conclude this to be a “simple and safe approach with high patient satisfaction, as reflected in low pain scores.”

Virtually Painless Option

My own skepticism about how a topical application can achieve such deeper anesthesia was dispelled following observation of the technique. Now, after use

in more than 200 patients, the no-needle vasectomy has become the standard technique in my practice. The following patient comment is typical of the experience: “For me, it was completely painless. No-needle vasectomy was even better than what I expected.” The learning curve for jet anesthesia is relatively short, though it is important that the surgeon be skilled in some form of minimally invasive vasectomy, such as the no-scalpel vasectomy. Also, precautions outlined in the manual must be taken to avoid self-injury from the device.

Anesthesia without a needle has been welcomed by many men. Dr. Marc Goldstein, an international authority on vasectomy at Cornell University, reported, “My patients have responded exceptionally well to the no-needle approach for vasectomy.”

Where Will the Public Find Out About This New Technique?

Experience tells us that as more is written about new techniques such as the no-needle vasectomy in the traditional media, men and their families will search for information from the Internet.

There are two Web sites available online for information about vasectomy and no-needle vasectomy. These sites are vasectomy.com, established in 1996 and currently the leading site for vasectomy and related information, and nonneedlevasectomy.com, with a special focus on this technique.

Public interest and acceptance of the procedure is expected to grow as this technique becomes more widely available—answering the significant objection of many prospective patients. With tubal ligations out-numbering vasectomies in the U.S. by two to one, this technique may finally help more men decide to have a vasectomy rather than a couple opting for female sterilization. And, as public knowledge and response increases, marketing-aware practices will recognize how to change their patient mix to better serve the needs of the public as well as bolster their overall revenues.

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