Adherence of neomycin to the tubing of a plate pouring machine

Margaret Macaulay et al. have shown that neomycin may become bound to silicone rubber tubing used for preparing media in the laboratory and may be carried over into diagnostic sensitivity test agar (DST, Oxoid) to inhibit the growth of coagulase negative staphylococci.

We have shown that neomycin, kanamycin, and gentamicin used in concentrations commonly recommended for anaerobe selective media may be carried over to other media through the same tubing, inhibiting the growth of any suitably sensitive organism. The consequences of any such media being used in the primary plating of specimens are obvious.

In this laboratory we use separate, identifiable tubing for pouring media containing these antibiotics, after which at least 3 litres hot water is flushed through. All non-inhibitory media, including MacConkey agar, are shown to support the growth of a sensitive Staphylococcus aureus (NCTC 6571) before being released for use. Those plates poured first in each batch should be selected for testing. We believe that unless other laboratories are equally thorough in their testing of poured media, some may have a serious carry over problem of which they are unaware.

RW SMYTH
Microbiology Department, General Hospital, Birmingham

Fine needle aspiration cytology

I enjoyed reading the review article published in your January 1985 issue. I think, however, that pathologists should be more aware of the fact that smears made from needle biopsies of the brain have been standard practice in numerous departments of neuropathology for many years. No doubt this has been contributed to by the value of Burr hole biopsy to neurosurgeons and the soft consistency of the biopsy.

HUME ADAMS
Department of Neuropathology, Institute of Neurological Sciences, Southern General Hospital, Glasgow

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Letters to the Editor

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As a firm believer in the value of fine needle aspiration cytology I was delighted to see a review article on the subject in the Journal of Clinical Pathology. The authors have provided a comprehensive overview in a comparatively short article.

The authors state, quite correctly, that up to 35% of percutaneous fine needle aspirations of lung may be complicated by pneumothorax. The great majority of these, however, are small, symptomless, and resolve spontaneously, and only 2-10% of cases require chest drainage. Pneumothorax is therefore not as fearsome a complication as it may at first appear. Aspiration is contraindicated only in severe emphysema and pulmonary hypertension.

As the authors have shown, fine needle aspiration is a safe and reliable method of diagnosis, applicable to virtually any site within the body.

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References

Material and methods

Pleural aspirates from empyemas and pulmonary abscesses as well as fluid from pleural drainage sites, and cultures of pleural fluid or pus were cultured in anaerobic media in anaerobic jars, and the cultures were anaerobic streptococci, some were possibly S. milleri. Their work and our isolation of pure cultures of anaerobic streptococci from pulmonary empyemas and abscesses prompted us to undertake a fuller study.

Results

Of 23 samples from patients with either empyemas or pulmonary abscesses, eight yielded S. milleri in pure culture when fistulae to the gastrointestinal tract were described elsewhere.

Table 1 Results of culture of specimens from patients with pulmonary empyemas and abscesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results of culture</th>
<th>No of specimens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No bacterial growth detected</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed coliforms; anaerobes and Streptococcus milleri</td>
<td>5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed coliforms and anaerobes</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staphylococcus aureus only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. milleri only</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Four patients had fistulae with the gastrointestinal tract.
†All had fistulae with the gastrointestinal tract.