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RENAL BLOOD FLOW IN THE
CONSCIOUS, UNRESTRAINED RAT.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy,
Department of Physiology,
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1989.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to test the hypothesis that the rate of renal blood flow remains constant under normal physiological conditions. Methods were developed for long term studies of renal blood flow (using the Doppler flow probe) and blood pressure in the conscious unrestrained rat. Special care was taken to maintain and observe the rats under normal, physiological conditions.

Since the Doppler flow probe measures blood velocity rather than flow, changes in renal arterial diameter will alter the output of the flow meter, even if flow is constant. In order to measure flow more accurately, changes in vessel diameter were prevented by a short length of Silastic tubing inserted into the renal ^{artery} under the probe. Blood flow was expressed as a percentage of the maximal flow measured when the animal was completely relaxed. Using this preparation, renal blood flow was measured continuously under normal conditions in both the light and dark cycles. Studies were performed to assess the effects on renal blood flow of anaesthesia, surgery and stress, and to assess the effect on renal blood flow of blockade of the renal nerves.

Renal blood flow was depressed approximately 50% by anaesthesia, due to the effects of the anaesthetic agent rather than the accompanying surgery. Renal blood flow did

not fully recover for 3-4 days after anaesthesia with, or without surgery.

Renal blood flow was depressed by stress, even though blood pressure was unchanged. A mild sudden auditory disturbance caused a transient 23% fall in renal blood flow. A continuous auditory disturbance, depressed renal blood flow by 16% for several minutes. Handling the rat resulted in a 33% fall in renal blood flow which lasted for over 30 minutes.

When measured continuously, renal blood flow was found to vary considerably. When the rat was completely relaxed renal blood flow was highest (defined as 100%). Renal blood flow remained high when eating and drinking (79%), but fell when the rat became alert but completely still (74%). During general movement renal blood flow was low (73%) with flow lowest while grooming (64%). Flow was apparently related to the degree of alertness and to activity. The extent of variation of flow is such that the calculated mean daily value of renal blood flow was only 80% of the maximum flow observed during complete relaxation.

The depression of renal blood flow seen during activity and disturbance was largely prevented during reversible blockade of the ipsilateral renal nerve, induced by slow infusion of Xylocaine around the renal artery. It was completely abolished by bilateral renal nerve blockade with

Xylocaine. The depressive effects of activity and disturbance on renal blood flow were restored an hour after the Xylocaine infusion ceased. These studies clearly show that renal nerve is involved in control of renal blood flow under physiological conditions.

It is clear that renal blood flow varies markedly under normal physiological conditions and in response to the external environment. A constant renal blood flow is not a necessity for normal renal function.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and assistance given by my supervisor Dr Mary Bullivant. I would like to use this opportunity to thank her for this help, especially for the many hours spent correcting and improving on my written work. Her guidance has helped me over some of the difficulties faced and given me the confidence to go on. I would also like to thank Ariell Vautier for her very capable technical assistance and also for her support and advice. Ariell has always been available and helpful especially in times of need.

The development of the self sealing device was principally due to the efforts of Dr Ellis Clarke. This was an enormous contribution to this project by improving the ease of handling catheters and connection of rats. Jonathan Koea was also involved with this aspect of the project and contributed much to technical developments in the early experiments.

Thanks are given for the technical advice and help ably provided by Joan Ready, John Quinn and Ariell Vautier. The Doppler flow meter, which was essential for this project, was built and serviced by Martin Garrett, design supplied by Valpey-Fisher. My special thanks are given to Martin for the many hours spent trying to reduce computer interference of

the signal. Despite the trying nature of this problem, he worked efficiently and without sign of frustration. I owe much gratitude to Stuart Glasson for the data acquisition programme that automated data entry into the computer. General technical help from Hugo van Wieringen, David Munoz, and Karn Hinton was greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Hill for his counsel and direction during this project and Dr Eade for his support as co-supervisor. I am grateful to Dr Paul Pilowsky for his help with the denervation experiments and to Dr Denis Loiselle and Dr Bill Hopkins for their help with statistics.

I am grateful for the financial support for this project. It was funded by the Auckland Medical Research Foundation; the Doppler flow meter was supplied by the Wallath trust and the microprocessor for data acquisition by Lottery Medical Research.

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DEFINITIONS

Observed behavioural patterns have been classified as:

Alert: motionless and expectant or sniffing the air.

Completely relaxed: curled up, very relaxed.

Eating or drinking.

Exploring or fossicking in litter.

Grooming.

Lightly quiescent: curled up, less relaxed.

Nesting or moving in sleep: twitching, scratching or changing position.

Resting: inactive in standing position.

Stretching, scratching or general whole body movement.

Other terms used in the text are:

Active: nesting, moving in sleep, eating, drinking, alert, exploring in litter, grooming or stretching.

Bilateral renal nerve block: infusion of Xylocaine onto both renal arteries.

Contralateral renal nerve: the right renal nerve.

Ipsilateral renal nerve: the left renal nerve, the side of the Doppler flow probe.

Passive: completely relaxed, lightly quiescent or resting.

Unilateral nerve block: an infusion of Xylocaine onto the left renal artery, the side of the Doppler flow probe.

Abbreviations have been largely avoided. Where necessary the following were used:

A-D: analog to digital.

PAH: para-amino hippuric acid.

PE: polyethylene.

PVC: polyvinyl chloride.

PVP: polyvinylpyrrolidone.

RBF: renal blood flow.

S.E.: standard error of the mean