Tumescent Anesthesia Not Just for Liposuction

BY BETSY BATES
Los Angeles Bureau

SAN DIEGO — Physicians should think outside the liposuction box when it comes to using tumescent anesthesia in dermatologic surgery practices, Dr. Jeffrey A. Klein said at the annual meeting of the California Society of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery.

Excisions, Mohs surgery, lipoma removal, breast reduction, and intravascular vein ablation all lend themselves well to the use of tumescent anesthesia, according to the discoverer of the technique.

Besides providing long-lasting and profound local anesthesia, elevation of tissues for delicate procedures, and bactericidal protection, the tumescent technique offers “exquisite hemostasis,” said Dr. Klein, a dermatologic surgeon in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., who is credited with revolutionizing the safety of liposuction anesthesia by pioneering the use of dilute concentrations of lidocaine and epinephrine in saline with sodium bicarbonate.

“I’m really impressed at how little blood loss there is,” he said.

In laser and radiofrequency procedures, tumescent anesthesia acts as a heat sink. For excisions or Mohs surgery on the neck or face, it can lift lesions safely away from superficial nerve branches, he pointed out.

It can be used in conjunction with dissection with blunt liposuction cannulas to separate fibrous, multilobular lipomas from surrounding tissue so they can be easily excised. In Germany, it is being used to perform sentinel lymph node biopsies on melanoma patients.

Dr. Klein outlined examples of numerous dermatologic procedures performed with tumescent liposuction, from the extraction of excess glandular tissue through the nipple of a patient with male gynecomastia to the excision of a large melanoma down to fascia.

Moobs surgery of a large, recurrent basal cell carcinoma can be accomplished as “essentially a painless procedure” during which the patient remains awake, he said.

The lack of infections seen following liposuction—just 1 in more than 6,000 procedures performed by Dr. Klein—suggests that “there must be a very substantial bacteriocidal effect” of tumescent solution, he said.

Tumescent anesthesia has been widely adopted by other specialties and is commonly used in stem cell harvesting and vein, breast, burn, craniofacial, and rectal surgery.

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