Motion resistant pulse oximetry in neonates
R Sahni, A Gupta, K Ohira-Kist, T S Rosen

Background: Pulse oximetry is widely used in neonates. However, its reliability is often affected by motion artefact. Clinicians confronted with questionable oxygen saturation (SpO2) values often estimate the reliability by correlating heart rate (HR) obtained with the oximeter with that obtained by electrocardiogram.

Objective: To compare the effects of motion on SpO2 and HR measurements made with Masimo signal extraction technology and those made with a Nellcor N-200.

Design: Continuous pulse oximetry and HR monitoring were performed in 15 healthy, term infants (mean (SD) birth weight 3408 (458) g) undergoing circumcision, using Masimo and Nellcor pulse oximeters and a standard HR monitor (Hewlett-Packard). Simultaneous minute by minute behavioural activity codes were also assigned. Baseline data were collected for 10 minutes when the infant was quietly asleep and then continued during and after circumcision for a total duration of one hour. The oximeter HR and SpO2 values were compared and related to HR values obtained by ECG during all three periods. The effect of behavioural activity on SpO2 and HR was also evaluated.

Results: When compared with results obtained with the Nellcor, the mean SpO2 and HR were higher and the incidence of artefact lower with the Masimo during all three periods. Masimo HR more accurately predicted HR obtained with a standard monitor, with lower residual error. SpO2 and HR values obtained with the Nellcor were lower and more variable during all behavioural states, especially crying, when excessive motion artefact was most likely.

Conclusions: The data suggest that Masimo signal extraction technology may offer improvement in pulse oximetry performance, particularly in clinical situations in which extreme motion artefacts are likely.

METHODS
Study population
The study population consisted of 15 healthy, term male infants (mean (SD) birth weight 3408 (458) g), all of whom were participants in a randomised controlled study of impact of non-invasive analgesia on the response of the infant to circumcision. All studies were approved by institutional review board, and written consent was obtained from parents of all infants.

Experimental design
Continuous pulse oximetry and HR monitoring were performed using Masimo signal extraction technology and Nellcor N-200 pulse oximeters and a standard HR monitor (Hewlett-Packard 3680). Baseline data were collected for 10 minutes with the infant quietly asleep. Data collection was then continued during and after circumcision for a total duration of one hour. Simultaneous minute by minute assessments of behavioural sleep and activity state were also made.

Abbreviations: HR, heart rate; ECG, electrocardiogram; SpO2, oxygen saturation
Experimental method
All circumcisions were performed in the infant physiology laboratory, located adjacent to the nursery. Infants were brought to the laboratory approximately half an hour before the procedure, at which time ECG leads were attached, and disposable adhesive pulse oximeter sensors (Nellcor N-25 and Masimo low noise optical probe Neo) were placed on the left foot. These sensors were optically shielded from each other to eliminate sensor to sensor optical crosstalk. The probes were then connected to the corresponding oximeter. Baseline data were collected for 10 minutes when the infant was quietly asleep with minimal movements. Infants were then given the appropriate analgesia, restrained in the Circumstraint (Olympic Medical, Seattle, Washington, USA), and circumcision was performed. Data collection continued during and after the procedure for the total duration of one hour. Sleep state was coded during the entire study period. Behaviour codes were assigned each minute using a scoring system developed and validated in our laboratory. Active sleep was coded whenever at least one rapid eye movement was observed, but no rapid jerks. An indeterminate state was coded when small body movements were observed, but no rapid eye movements were seen. Codes were also assigned for wakefulness and crying.1

All pulse oximeter data were collected electronically using an RS-232 serial communication port on each instrument. Both SpO₂ and the instantaneous HR from each oximeter were recorded digitally once per second throughout the entire study. The ECG was obtained from a standard HR monitor and fed to a special purpose R-R interval preprocessor, where the R-R intervals were calculated with an accuracy of one millisecond. Mean HR for each minute of the data was computed as 60 times the inverse of the mean of the R-R intervals.

Data analysis
There were times when the oximeter reported no data because of extensive artefact. These epochs were assigned a numeric value of zero by the oximeter rather than a code for no data and no number was displayed. In epochs of less extensive artefact, however, the instruments put out a number that is a moving average of good and artefactual readings. Inclusion of such points designated as zero obviously would amplify the differences between the two oximeters inappropriately, so these measurements were excluded and a different criterion for designation of artefact was developed.

Average HR variability was first computed as the standard deviation of the R-R intervals obtained from the Hewlett-Packard cardia monitor for all three periods: baseline, during circumcision, and after circumcision. This normal HR variability ranged from 10.3 to 17.5 beats/min across all infants during the three periods (baseline, 10.3; circumcision, 17.5; after circumcision, 13.7). All oximeter measurements differing from the corresponding ECG measurements by more than 10 beats were designated as artefact. The percentage of epochs designated as artefact was then computed from these edited data for all three periods. Minute averages for SpO₂ and HR were also computed from the artefact-free oximeter data. Behavioural state codes were logged to the appropriate minutes. The amount of artefact in the raw data from the two instruments, expressed as percentage artefact, was compared for all three periods using the raw data from the two instruments, expressed as logged to the appropriate minutes. The amount of artefact in the artefact-free oximeter data. Behavioural state codes were assigned each minute using a scoring system developed and validated in our laboratory. Active sleep was coded whenever at least one rapid eye movement was observed, but no rapid jerks. An indeterminate state was coded during the entire study period. Behaviour states. The effects were most pronounced during behavioural activity states associated with excessive motion artefact—that is, active sleep, awake, and crying. As expected, during non-sleeping states (awake, crying), higher HR values were recorded by the Masimo; however, the Nellcor recorded not only much lower but more variable HR values during active sleep, awake, and crying states than those recorded during quiet sleep. This was also reflected in the SpO₂ measurements, which remained stable for Masimo but were significantly lower for Nellcor during all behavioural activity states. For example, during crying (64% of the crying behaviour was observed during the circumcision period), when extreme motion artefact was most likely, the Nellcor recorded significantly lower SpO₂ than the Masimo (mean (SD) 92.5 (9.9) v 95.2 (4.2), p < 0.0005).

DISCUSSION
The accuracy and reliability of conventional pulse oximetry is limited by subject motion.2 A possible explanation for this limitation involves the confounding effects of venous blood flow. Conventional pulse oximeters assume that the arterial compartment is the only compartment that contains pulsating blood flow. During patient motion, however, the venous

### Table 1
Mean percentage artefact (defined as all pulse oximetry data with a difference greater than 10 beats between the pulse oximeter heart rate and the corresponding ECG heart rate) with Masimo and Nellcor pulse oximeters before, during, and after circumcision (n = 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masimo</th>
<th>Nellcor</th>
<th>p Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>4.0 (1.9)</td>
<td>13.1 (4.9)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumcision</td>
<td>25.2 (5.9)</td>
<td>63.8 (5.8)</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>7.7 (2.2)</td>
<td>33.8 (4.9)</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
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</table>

Values are mean (SD).
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 intervene.

larly in the most ill patients, who are most susceptible to

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infants, with at least 10 changes that last more than 10

artefact during pulse oximetry recordings is also dependent

in Sp O2 measurement will be influenced by venous blood

arterial signal amplitude, and magnitude of

motion.41 9 The motion-added signal produces false Sp O2

values to the extent that the extra signal, which does not

represent the arterial pulse oxyhaemoglobin/deoxyhaemoglo-

bin signal, is large relative to the arterial pulse signal. When

the motion is major, absolutely or in relation to arterial pulse

signal, the motion-added signal tends to predominate over

the pulse signal, so that the red/infrared ratio transmitted to

the photoreceptor produces a false Sp O2 value. An additional

and specific source of error in conventional pulse oximetry

occurs when noise from a variety of signal inputs that are not

a part of the true arterial pulse signal is introduced equally

into both the red and infrared channels, driving the red/

infrared ratio towards unity. This ratio of 1.0 predicts a

satisfaction of ~82% according to conventional pulse oximetry

algorithm.4 9 Such motion and noise artefacts are disturbing.

They also limit accurate assessment of oxygenation, particu-

larly in the most ill patients, who are most susceptible to

eroneous saturation readings.

periods of absent or inaccurate Sp O2 values due to motion

artefact are not insignificant, and may affect up to 50% of the

recorded tracings in preterm and term infants.19 Motion

artefact during pulse oximetry recordings is also dependent

on behavioural state. Recent reports have documented as

many as six changes in behavioural state per hour in preterm

infants, with at least 10 changes that last more than 10

minutes per hour.19 Nursing interventions and noise inde-

pendently result in significant changes in both the behav-

ioural and physiological responses of infants studied.19 Such

problems are worse during transport and during more

physically active periods such as resuscitations.20 22 These

are specific situations in which accurate pulse oximetry

values would improve our understanding of abnormal

oxygenation and the effects of oxygen therapy and other

interventions.

Various methods have been devised to minimise the loss of

signal associated with motion. Most of these involve

averaging the signal over longer periods of time and/or

rejecting rapid unphysiological changes in the signal ratio.13

Both techniques represent best guesses rather than true

measurements. A new electronic signal processing technique

and sensor design, called signal extraction technology by

Masimo Corporation, has been reported to considerably

reduce false Sp O2 values during patient motion.8 13 15 23

The Masimo paradigm is based on the assumption that

arterial blood is not the only absorptive substance in tissue

that may generate a pulsatile optical signal. An adaptive filter

system is used to separately identify the energy present at

each saturation in the range 1–100% in 0.5% increments

every 0.4 second. Once the discrete saturation transformation

identifies and verifies the energy peak produced by the

pulsating arterial blood, which is usually the peak corre-

sponding to the highest saturation in the discrete saturation

transformation, it reports this value as the patient’s Sp O2.

Thus, it is able to cancel the noise signal and separate the

arterial signals from artefacts. This results in superior signal

acquisition and reduces the risk of false alarms during

motion at the monitoring site.19

Our study shows that the Sp O2 and HR signals from

Masimo are less variable, and the Masimo HR signal more

accurately predicts the Hewlett-Packard HR during both

resting and increased activity states. With signal extraction

technology, the superior signal handling during increased

activity states associated with higher degree of motion

artefact is understandable, but differences are also observed

during baseline and behavioural quiet sleep periods. Various

factors could potentially contribute to these differences.

The signal drop out rate—that is, periods with no acceptable

data—is much higher with conventional oximetry and may

contribute most significantly to these differences. Of course,

the internal smoothing algorithms and other editing func-

tions limit the impact of these disturbances on the digital

output of both devices, and the zero outputs are invisible to

the observer. For example, in our study, during quiet sleep,

which is associated with greatly reduced but not totally

abdominal physical activity, the drop out rate in the raw data

was 50 times greater for the Nellcor than the Masimo oximeter

(4.81% v 0.09%). An artefact reduction algorithm was applied

to the raw data before the comparative analysis, and, despite

that, the performance of the Masimo oximeter was noted to

be superior. Another possible factor that may have con-

tributed to these differences is sensor to sensor cross talk, as

<table>
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<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Oxygen saturation (SpO2) and heart rate (HR) recorded with Masimo and Nellcor pulse oximeters (artefact-free data) before, during, and after circumcision (n = 15)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masimo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SpO2 (%)</td>
<td>98.2 (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR (beats/ min)</td>
<td>126.6 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are mean (SD).

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<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Relation of Masimo and Nellcor oximeter heart rates to cardiac monitor heart rate before, during, and after circumcision (n = 15)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masimo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation coefficient (r²)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual error (beats/min)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
both oximeter sensors were on the same foot. During the planning of this experimental protocol, we had noted that the leg movements were not symmetrical when the infants were restrained in the Circumstraint, particularly during times of excessive motion (circumcision). This movement asymmetry would have significantly affected our primary objective of comparing the oximeter performance during motion. So, to test the oximeter performance under a similar degree of motion, the sensors were placed on the dorsum of the left foot as far from each other as possible and optically shielded to prevent cross talk. However, this may not have completely eliminated it, and cross talk may have contributed to minor differences in $\text{SpO}_2$; this is a study limitation.

Our data suggest that the Masimo signal extraction technology may improve pulse oximetry performance particularly in clinical situations in which extreme motion is likely, such as circumcision and crying in our neonates. Also, superior performance during times of minimal motion or when the infant is motionless suggests better signal acquisition and processing with the Masimo signal extraction technology. Further studies investigating the effects of this new technology on clinical care and outcomes will be necessary. Such application studies should include evaluation of nursing time and effort, medical judgments about routine oxygen deficits and oxygen therapy, and assessments of usefulness during active behaviour, transport, and resuscitation.

Instrumentation that is considerably more accurate and reliable, with much greater sensitivity and specificity, may offer a definite advantage over current home monitoring systems, which have notoriously high rates of false alarms. A more accurate and reliable pulse oximeter should have the capacity to refine the therapeutic use of oxygen and benefit patient management and outcome.

### References


### Authors’ affiliations

R Sahni, A Gupta, K Ohira-Kist, T S Rosen, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA.

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