

Regional Anesthetic Blocks in Plastic Surgery Using Portable Ultrasound

A Simplified Approach

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Background: With the introduction of latest generation ultrasound technology and its easy availability and portability, regional anesthetic blocks, which were formally in the domain of anesthesiologists, have now become available to practicing plastic surgeons. Enhanced Recovery After Surgery protocols for other specialties such as orthopedics and colorectal surgery have incorporated regional anesthetic blocks. These regional blocks have been shown to be effective in improving the patient comfort and experience and decreasing reliance on opioid medications.

Methods: Patients scheduled for elective plastic surgery received PEC-1, serratus anterior plane, or transversus abdominis plane blocks as indicated for the proposed procedure. All blocks were performed under ultrasound guidance using the Philips Lumify system with the linear array 12-4 probe by the operating surgeon.

Results: A total of 83 patients received regional anesthetic blocks by the senior author. Thirty-three patients undergoing cosmetic breast augmentation or implant-based breast reconstruction received the PEC-1 and the serratus anterior plane blocks after the induction of anesthesia but before the prep and drape. Fifty patients undergoing either abdominoplasty or deep inferior epigastric perforator flap reconstruction received intraoperative transversus abdominis plane blocks. Anatomic planes were clearly visualized with this new ultrasound technology. Patients experienced good to excellent analgesia with less reliance on opioid medications and decreased need for refills. For hospitalized patients, length of stay in some cases was decreased up to 1 day, and PCA pumps were eliminated. There were no complications or adverse sequelae observed in any of these patients related to the regional blocks.

Conclusions: Incorporation of these known regional anesthetic techniques in this single-surgeon experience seems to confirm reports of effectiveness in the anesthesia literature and may be of benefit to a wide range of plastic surgery patients.

Key Words: regional blocks, ultrasound, breast reconstruction, abdominoplasty, breast augmentation, local anesthesia, regional anesthesia, Exparel, bupivacaine, portable ultrasound, TAP block, TAP, SAP block, PEC block, PEC-1 block, ultrasound-guided anesthesia

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Regional anesthetic blocks have proven efficacy in the anesthesia literature.^{1–5} Transversus abdominis plane (TAP) block was originally introduced in 2002 by Rafi.⁶ Reliability and effectiveness were substantially improved when ultrasound-guided TAP blocks were introduced in 2007 by Hebbard et al.⁷ Since then, numerous publications have verified efficacy for procedures such as inguinal hernia repair, ventral hernia repair, cholecystectomy, colorectal surgery, hysterectomy,

cesarean section, and among other procedures.^{1,8–11} In breast surgery, the introduction of PEC-1 block offered a promising and attractive alternative to the widely used paravertebral block.^{12–14} Regional blocks are widely used in other specialties and have become a component of many Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) protocols.^{15–23} PEC-1 blocks were introduced in 2012 by Blanco.²⁴ This has been followed by other regional thoracic blocks including the serratus anterior plane (SAP) block.^{25–28}

In contrast to the previously mentioned specialties, regional blocks have not been routinely used in plastic and reconstructive surgery; however, a recent report by Temple-Oberle et al²¹ demonstrated the efficacy of TAP blocks in reducing length of stay in patients undergoing DIEP flap for breast reconstruction. Although the literature is replete with studies verifying the effectiveness of TAP blocks, there are fewer reports available for the newer PEC-1 and SAP blocks.^{25–32}

With the availability of high-resolution, portable ultrasound, more widespread use of these regional blocks has become possible. The learning curve required for the successful administration of these regional blocks is short, and plastic surgeons can incorporate these useful techniques into their practice in both inpatient and outpatient settings.^{33,34}

PATIENTS AND METHODS

Between 2015 and 2017, all patients scheduled for cosmetic breast augmentation with prostheses as well as patients scheduled for implant-based submuscular breast reconstruction were offered the combination of PEC-1 plus SAP blocks. Patients scheduled for either DIEP flap reconstruction or elective abdominoplasty were offered TAP blocks. All regional blocks were performed with a linear array 12-4 probe under ultrasound guidance. The probe was connected to a Galaxy S2 tablet. High-quality images were obtained with the Lumify application by Philips (PHILIPS Ultrasound, Inc, Bothell, Wash.), (Fig. 1).

Anesthetic Injection Technique

Regional blocks were performed with both 0.25% bupivacaine with epinephrine or a dilute solution of liposomal bupivacaine, Exparel (Pacira Pharmaceuticals, Parsippany-Troy Hills, NJ). For the 0.25% bupivacaine with epinephrine, approximately 15 to 20 mL was used per injection site depending on the patient's body weight to allow for up to 4 injections (bilateral PEC-1 + SAP blocks or 4-quadrant TAP blocks). The dilute solution of liposomal bupivacaine solution was prepared as follows: 266 mg (20 mL, 1 vial Exparel) + 125 mg (50 mL 0.25% bupivacaine) to yield a total volume of 70 mL of injectable solution also to allow up to 4 injections of 17.5 mL each. Aspiration was performed each time to assure no intravascular injection. In addition, 3 to 5 mL of sterile injectable saline was used as a test dose under ultrasound visualization for each injection to assure correct needle placement and that the correct plane was identified. Once the injectate was placed and confirmed, the needle and tubing were flushed with 10 to 15 mL of sterile injectable saline.

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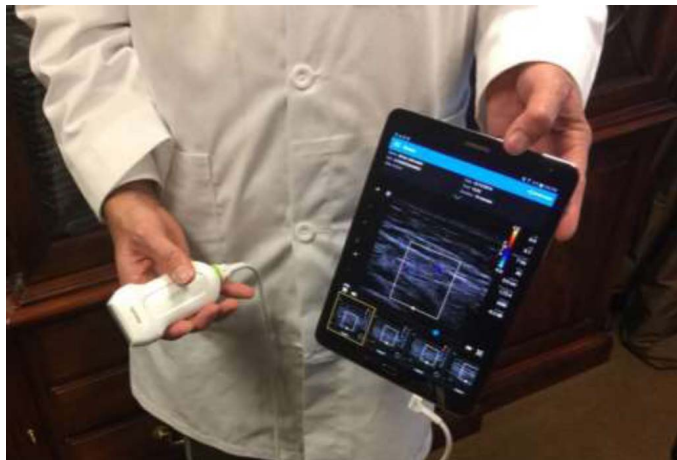


FIGURE 1. Portable Ultrasound probe and Tablet: Lumify by Philips.

Technical Details

1. **PEC-1 BLOCKS:** The ultrasound probe is positioned approximately halfway between the thoracoacromial artery and the acromion, approximately 1 to 2 cm below the clavicle as shown in Figure 2. The ultrasound image obtained is shown in Figure 3. The needle is placed at the corner of and as close as possible to the ultrasound probe. A video of the anesthetic being delivered between the pectoralis major and minor muscles is shown in Video 1, <http://links.lww.com/SAP/A336>. The anesthetic delivered broadly dissects between the pectoralis major and minor muscles and anesthetizes the multiple branches of the medial and lateral pectoral nerves in this area.
2. **SERRATUS ANTERIOR PLANE BLOCKS:** The approach to the SAP is at the level of the fourth rib in approximately the midaxillary line. The ultrasound image at this level is shown in Figure 4. The posture of the needle is at a 90-degree angle to the ultrasound beam. The approach at this level is shown in Figure 5. The goal is to place the needle precisely in the subserratus plane as shown in Figure 6 and Video 2, <http://links.lww.com/SAP/A337>. Once the subserratus plane is entered, there is easy dissection of the anesthetic broadly up and down the lateral chest wall area, as it lifts the serratus muscle slips away from the ribs. The distribution of the anesthetic will target the lateral intercostal branches of T2 through T6. Subcutaneous infiltration of the parasternal area is also required to block the anterior branches of the intercostal nerves. This additional infiltration must be done to obtain near complete anesthesia of the anterior chest wall.
3. **TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS PLANE BLOCK:** During an abdominoplasty or DIEP flap, the plastic surgeon has an advantage over his anesthesia colleague due to the exposure. The senior author (J.T.L.) uses the 4-quadrant abdominal wall technique under ultrasound guidance, as described by Niraj et al.³⁵ This technique consists of bilateral subcostal and lower abdominal injection sites allowing a near complete anesthesia of the entire abdominal wall.

The rationale for this approach is based on the segmental innervation of the abdominal wall. To anesthetize dermatomes T7 through T10 of the supraumbilical abdomen, a subcostal approach is used in the anterior axillary line approximately 2 cm below the rib margin. On the other hand, the iliohypogastric nerve covering T11 to L1 is anesthetized via an ilioinguinal approach: this consists of injecting the local anesthetic 1 to 2 cm inferior and 1 to 2 cm medial to the anterior superior iliac spine.³⁶ The choice of this anatomical landmark is based on the knowledge of the anatomic course of the ilioinguinal and iliohypogastric nerves (T11 + L1) that provide most of the sensation to the groin and pubic area. These 2 nerves are initially deep to the

transversus abdominis muscle, as they travel from posterior to anterior. At the junction of the anterior and middle thirds of the iliac crest, these 2 nerves then become more superficial and course in the plane between the transversus abdominis and internal oblique muscles with the other intercostal nerves.

Therefore, it is critical that the “lower quadrant” injection site be located 1 to 2 cm medial and inferior to the anterior superior iliac spine to provide adequate analgesia to the groin and pubic areas.

Finally, the use of the 4-quadrant approach allows reliable coverage of the T10 dermatome, an anatomically and radiographically proven watershed area.^{37,38} The locations of these 2 injections are illustrated in Figure 7. The 3 layers of the anterior abdominal wall are clearly visualized at both of these sites of injection as demonstrated in Figure 8. The target for the anesthetic injection is between the internal oblique and transversus abdominis muscles. A video of the ultrasound-guided TAP block is shown in Video 3, <http://links.lww.com/SAP/A338>.

RESULTS

A total of 83 patients underwent regional blocks by the senior author. Thirty-three patients underwent both the PEC-1 and SAP blocks, who were having either breast augmentation or implant-based breast reconstruction. Fifty patients undergoing either abdominoplasty or DIEP flap reconstruction received TAP blocks. These regional anesthetic blocks were administered for a 2-year period, between 2015 and 2017. Anatomic planes were clearly visualized with the Lumify portable ultrasound device (Fig. 8).

Patients experienced good to excellent postoperative analgesia with less reliance on opioid medications and decreased need for narcotic medication refills (see discussion section). Hospitalized patients' length of stay in some cases was decreased up to 1 day, and PCA pumps were eliminated. There were no complications or adverse sequelae observed in any of these patients related to the regional blocks.

DISCUSSION

Incorporation of regional anesthetic blocks in the specialty of plastic surgery has lagged somewhat behind other specialties. The reasons for this are multifactorial. For cosmetic cases, the additional expense and the need for an anesthesiologist with expertise in regional blocks are no longer required. For patients undergoing common inpatient procedures such as DIEP flaps, the operating surgeon has the advantage of exposure, thus facilitating the regional block and perhaps decreasing operative delays. Regional blocks have demonstrated efficacy in the specialty of orthopedic surgery.³⁹ In particular, femoral



FIGURE 2. PEC-1 block landmarks and injection technique.

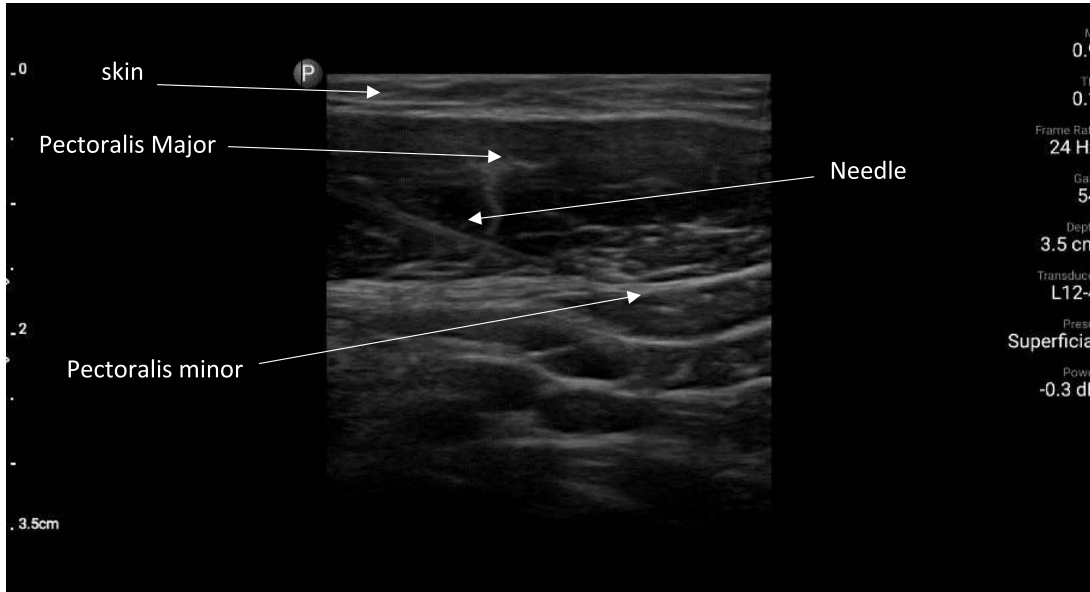


FIGURE 3. PEC-1 block: Ultrasound image showing the needle inserted between pectoralis major and minor muscles.

nerve blocks done under ultrasound guidance in addition to local soft tissue infiltration have been demonstrated to be very effective in enhancing patient experience and decreasing opioid requirements for knee replacement surgery. For that reason, regional anesthetic blocks have been incorporated routinely into orthopedic ERAS protocols. The same phenomenon has been true in the colorectal specialty. Routine use of TAP blocks has been incorporated into abdominal procedures, also enhancing patient experience, decreasing opioid requirements, and in many cases decreasing length of stay. For these reasons, regional blocks have been incorporated into colorectal surgery ERAS protocols. Efficacy of regional anesthetic blocks has been well established in the anesthesia literature. PEC-1 blocks have been particularly effective for patients having submuscular prostheses placed for either cosmetic reasons or reconstruction. The SAP block is one of several blocks that had

demonstrated efficacy in chest wall anesthesia. Transversus abdominis plane blocks have likewise been shown to be efficacious in a variety of surgical procedures. Most recently, TAP blocks have been successfully used for patients receiving DIEP flaps with both increased patient comfort and decreased length of stay.²¹



FIGURE 4. Ultrasound image of SAP block. Arrow marks the plane between the rib and serratus muscle. Local anesthetic is injected in this plane.



FIGURE 5. Technique of needle insertion in SAP block.

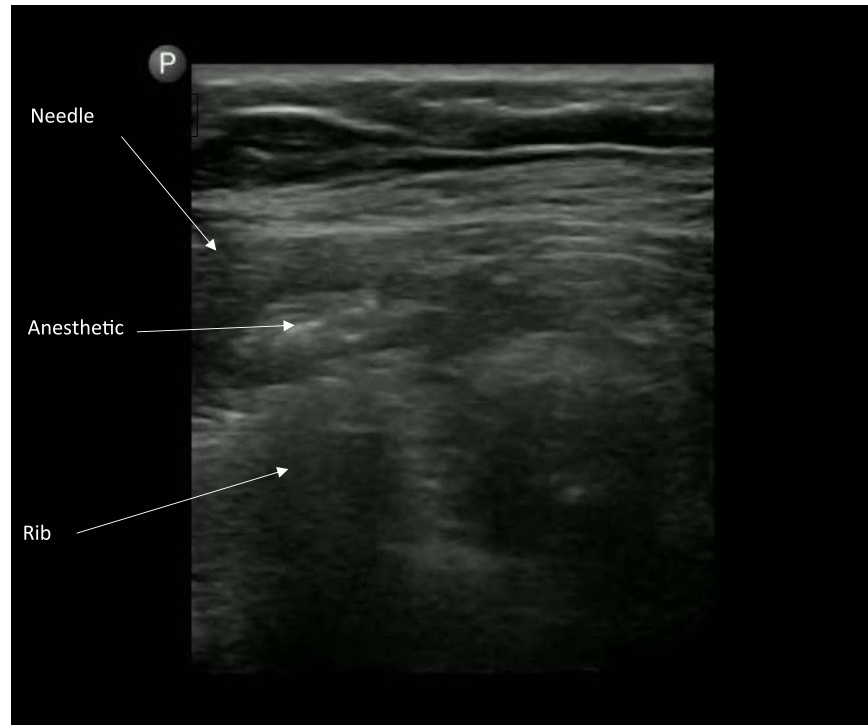


FIGURE 6. Needle position in SAP block.

The senior author has adopted a multimodal, opioid-sparing, ERAS protocol for plastic surgery in which is embedded liberal intraoperative usage of these ultrasound-guided field blocks. The clinical effectiveness of this comprehensive approach to pain management is the subject of a forthcoming publication, which quantifies efficacy and decreased opioid usage. Since adoption of this protocol in the senior author's practice 6 months ago, there has been an immediate and precipitous drop in prescription opioid usage. With incorporation of these field blocks into the ERAS protocols, the multimodality regimens work equally well with low-pain-scale procedures (such as breast reduction, liposuction, mastopexy) and high-pain-scale procedures (such as abdominoplasty, breast augmentation, submuscular tissue expander,

DIEP flaps). In the senior author's practice in the past, patients routinely received prescriptions for 40 of either oxycodone-acetaminophen or hydrocodone-acetaminophen combination medication. With the new protocol, patients receive a total of ten 5-mg tablets of oxycodone. It is also our observation that requests for refills for opioid medication and complaints of nausea and constipation have also decreased.

The ERAS protocol currently in use by the senior author follows the consensus guidelines for clinical practice put forth by the American Pain Society, the American Society of Regional Analgesia and Pain Medicine, and the American Society of Anesthesiologists.⁴⁰ Patients receive preoperative education, preoperative carbohydrate loading (carbohydrate drink up to 2 hours before surgery), preoperative dosing of gabapentin 300 mg, acetaminophen gel caps 1000 mg, and celecoxib 400 mg per os (PO) on call to the operating room. Intraoperatively, patients receive ultrasound-guided regional pain blocks. For cases lasting 3 hours or more, patients receive ketorolac 30 mg intravenous and 30 mg intramuscular 30 minutes before emergence from anesthesia. Postoperatively, patients are placed on both scheduled acetaminophen (1000 mg PO every 6 hours for 6 doses total) and celecoxib (200 mg PO every 12 hours for 4 doses total) before going to an as-needed dosing schedule. Rescue is with 5 mg oxycodone PO every 6 hours as needed.

The liposomal bupivacaine solution used in this study is an on-label formulation of Exparel, as the manufacturer allows mixing of the Exparel with bupivacaine as long as the milligram dosage of Exparel exceeds the milligram dosage of bupivacaine in the solution by 2:1. Lidocaine was not chosen in this study, because it is contraindicated to be mixed in solution with Exparel. Presence of lidocaine causes premature release of bupivacaine from the DepoFoam particles, thus negating the prolonged anesthetic effect of Exparel through sustained release over time. Bupivacaine was chosen in this study to be mixed in solution with Exparel for 2 reasons. First, data from currently available trials indicates the superiority of outcomes as measured by improved postoperative pain scores, reduced postsurgical opioid consumption, and reduced "worst pain scores in the first 72 hours."⁴¹ Second, pharmacokinetic data shows higher systemic bupivacaine levels after injection of bupivacaine compared with systemic levels



FIGURE 7. TAP block. The (X) mark two quadrants on the patient's left. Same technique is reproduced on the contralateral side.

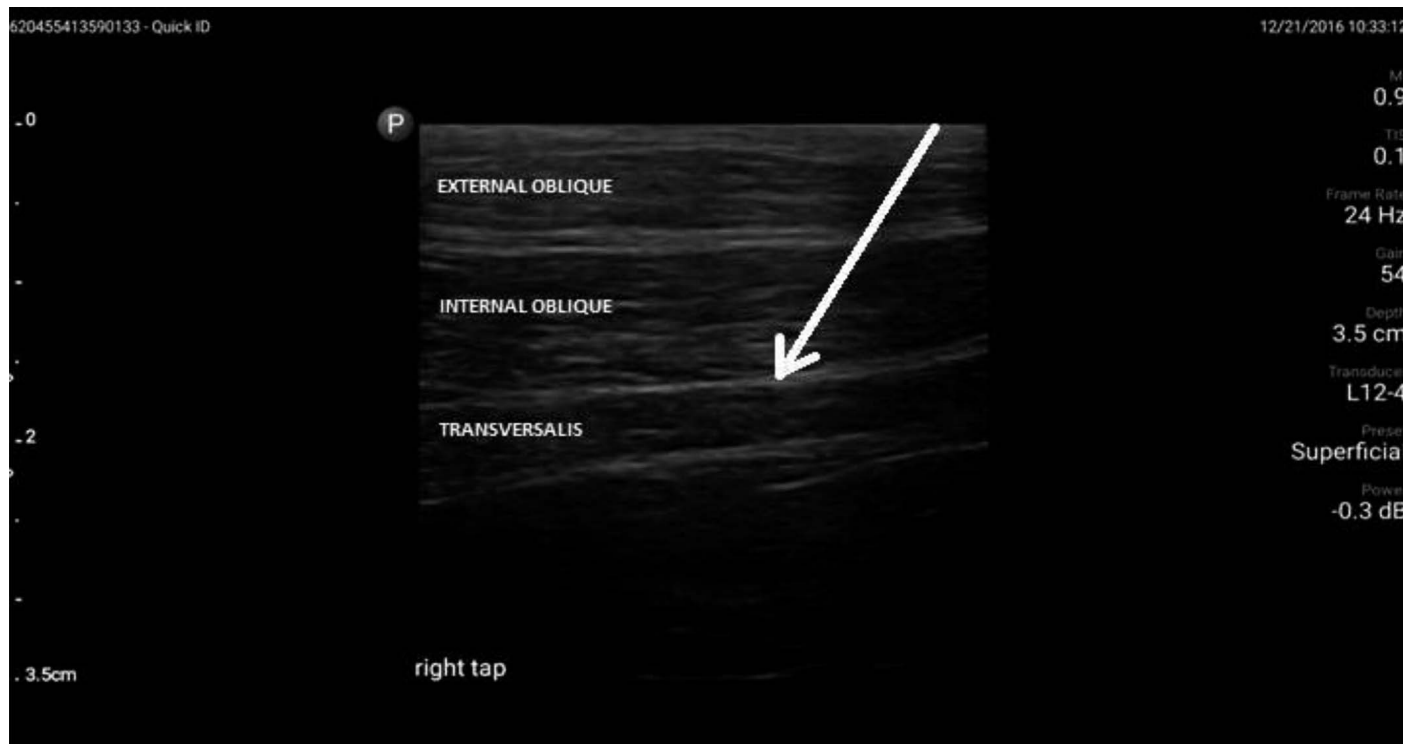


FIGURE 8. Ultrasound image of the needle insertion in TAP block.

after injection with Exparel.⁴² This is an anticipated phenomenon considering that Exparel is designed for slower, more sustained release of bupivacaine. Clinically, this has been extrapolated to mean that the immediate postprocedural anesthetic effect of Exparel alone may be delayed when compared with bupivacaine, but this effect has not been quantitated in any available study.

It is this authors' opinion that the use of bupivacaine as the diluent rather than sterile injectable saline afforded patients more immediate relief from pain while in the postanesthetic care unit compared with patients receiving liposomal bupivacaine alone; however, this effect was not quantified in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Incorporation of these well-known regional anesthetic techniques in this single-surgeon experience seems to confirm reports of effectiveness in the anesthesia literature and may be of benefit to a wide range of plastic surgery patients.

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