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NUMBER 1

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Percutaneous Approach to the Kidney. By G.G. TAILLY. <i>4 Med. 97 572</i>	1
Perinephric Abscess. By J.R. MALDONADO, M.D., and A. MELMENDO, M.D. <i>5 1991</i>	7
Prone Split-Leg Position for Nephroscopic Surgery. By G. BACCHINI, M.S., and D.H. BACCHINI, M.D. <i>+ Suppl. + Index</i>	13
Pathologic-Anatomic Correlates of Shock Wave Lithotripsy. By G. SEITZ, M.D., K. FLETZER, M.D., D. NEISIUS, M.D., W. DIPPEL, M.D., and T. GEBHARDT, M.D. <i>Vol. 1-5</i>	17
Inguinal Pelviscopy in the Examination of Pelvic Organs: Further Study. By A. SHAFIK, M.D.	21
Renal Injury by Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy. By A.P. EVAN, Ph.D., L.R. WILLIS, Ph.D., B.A. CONNORS, B.A., J.A. MCATEER, Ph.D., and J.E. LINGEMAN, M.D.	25
Parameters Influencing Renal Damage in Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy: An Experimental Study in Pigs. By H. EL-DAMANHOURY, M.D., T. SCHAUB, M.D., M. STADTBÄUMER, M. KUNISCH, S. STÖRKEL, M.D., H. SCHILD, M.D., M. THELEN, M.D., and R. HOHENFELLNER, M.D.	37
Simultaneous Bilateral Extracorporeal Shock Wave Treatments of the Kidney in a Primate Model. By D.E. NEAL, Jr., M.D., E. HARMON, M.D., T. HLAVINKA, M.D., M.B. KAACK, Ph.D., and R. THOMAS, M.D.	41
Staghorn Stone Treatment with Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy Monotherapy: Long-Term Results. By A.M. FUCHS, M.D., B.A. WOLFSON, M.D., and G.J. FUCHS, M.D.	45
Retrograde Cold-Knife Endopyelotomy in Secondary Stenosis of the Ureteropelvic Junction. By M. GALLUCCI, M.D., G. ALPI, M.D., G.P. RICCIUTI, M.D., A. CASSANELLI, M.D., F. PERSECHINO, M.D., and F. DI SILVERIO, M.D.	49
Alexandrite Laser Lithotripter in Experimental and First Clinical Application. By H.M. WEBER, M.D., K. MILLER, M.D., J. RÜSCHOFF, M.D., J. GSCHWEND, M.D., and R.E. HAUTMANN, M.D.	51
Reduction of Shock Wave-Induced Tubular Alteration by Fosfomycin. By W.L. STROHMAIER, M.D., M. PEDRO, M.D., D.M. WILBERT, M.D., and K.-H. BICHLER, M.D.	57

Continued

Author Index for Volumes 1 through 5

A

Abbruzzese, M.R., 3:43
Abdel-Dayem, H.M., 2:23
Abdel-Hakim, A.M., 1:265
Ackerman, D.M., 2:333
Ackermann, D., 3:355
Ackermann, R., 5:293
Adams, J.R., 4:217
Adams, M.C., 3:245
Addonzio, J.C., 1:107, 3:85
Akins, E.W., 1:235
Albala, D.M., 5:277
Aldape, H.C., 3:115
Alexander, M.E., 5:273
Allhoff, E.P., 5:205
Alpi, G., 3:381, 5:49
Aman, H.M., 5:307
Anderson, P.A.M., 3:31
Andriole, G.L., 1:61, 3:163, 3:307, 5:89
Aqüera, L.G., 5:201
Arai, T., 5:245
Aronson, W.J., 5:337
Aso, Y., 4:361
Assimos, D.G., 5:145
Atala, A.A., 2:333, 4:175
Awad, S.A., 3:31

B

Baba, S., 1:227, 4:253
Bachor, R., 2:113, 2:131, 3:287, 3:295
Badillo, F.L., 5:197
Badlani, G.H., 1:23, 2:389, 4:117, 5:105, 5:113, 5:169
Baert, L., 5:301
Baffigo, G., 5:225
Bagley, C.M., 3:115
Bagley, D.H., 1:161, 2:189, 3:91, 4:155, 4:229, 5:13
Bagley, M.D., 1:15
Bahar, R.H., 2:23
Bahson, R.R., 1:61, 5:327
Balk, N., 5:195
Banno, J., 5:123
Barbaric, Z., 4:27, 5:337
Baretton, G., 3:439
Barker, M., 4:323
Baskin, L.S., 3:51, 4:49
Bass, R.B., 3:193
Bayo, A., 4:269
Bean, W.J., 1:173
Beard, J.H., 3:193
Begun, F.P., 3:81, 4:223
Behnia, R., 5:345
Belis, J.A., 4:331

Ben, A., 3:69
Bender, L., 4:365
Benetos, F.C., 5:197
Benkert, S., 3:315
Benson, C.B., 5:241
Benson, M.C., 1:153
Benson, R.C., 2:189
Bentt, L., 4:365
Berger, N., 5:129
Berián, J.M., 5:201
Bertermann, H., 4:55
Beyer, D.C., 4:375, 4:389, 5:255
Bhatta, K.M., 3:433
Bichler, K.H., 5:57, 5:195
Bierkens, A.F., 4:353, 4:399
Bihrlé, R., 5:341
Bixon, R., 1:153
Blasko, J.C., 3:115, 3:209
Bottaccini, M.R., 4:315
Bottino, P., 2:1, 2:47, 3:367, 4:241
Boving, R., 5:301
Bowers, G.W., 4:183
Boyce, W.H., 2:287
Brady, T., 5:123
Braf, Z., 4:199
Braga, E., 3:85
Brandt, T., 2:367
Brawer, M.K., 3:227
Brewer, S.L., 2:333
Brito, C.G., 5:341
Brown, M.W., 1:181
Brown, R.D., 3:265
Bub, P., 2:193, 2:375
Buelna, T., 5:117
Bundy, A.L., 5:241
Burns, J.R., 3:419, 4:123
Butler, M.R., 2:181
Butler, S.A., 3:167

C

Caione, P., 3:381
Canal, D.F., 5:341
Canto, R.J., 1:209, 2:63
Capozzo, N., 3:381
Carbin, B.E., 5:351
Carbone, A., 5:225
Carey, P., 2:283
Carini, M., 1:249
Carson, C.C., 1:45, 1:181, 4:143
Carter, H.B., 1:37
Carter, S., 1:137
Carter, S.S., 3:147, 5:137
Cass, A.S., 5:191
Cassanelli, A., 5:49

Castañeda, F., 1:269, 5:123
Castañeda-Zuñiga, 1:269, 2:11, 3:219
Caviglia, C., 2:1, 2:47, 3:367, 3:401, 4:241
Ceresoli, A., 5:61
Cerulli, N., 5:225
Chang, T.T., 3:125
Chao, P.W., 1:55
Chaussy, C.G., 1:1, 2:97, 2:117, 3:329
Cheval, M.J., 4:259
Chen, J., 4:199
Chiang, B., 2:107
Chinn, S.K.B., 5:345
Chodak, G.W., 5:333
Choyke, P.L., 4:393
Clayman, R.V., 1:19, 1:61, 1:145, 2:83, 2:177, 2:319, 3:265, 3:307, 3:425, 4:1, 4:79, 4:247, 4:301, 5:117, 5:277, 5:357
Coleman, C.C., 5:229
Colón-Pérez, B., 1:209
Connors, B.A., 5:25
Cooley, B.C., 2:299
Coolsaet, B., 4:15
Cooner, W.H., 3:193
Copen, D.E., 3:163
Coptcoat, M.J., 1:119, 1:137, 2:309, 2:321
Cord, J., 3:85
Costantini, A., 1:249
Coulson, W., 2:341
Cubell, V., 1:275
Cubler-Goodman, A., 5:13
Culkin, D.J., 4:217
Cunningham, D.L., 3:209

D

Daidoh, Y., 5:245
Dan, S.J., 2:279, 2:407
Das, A.K., 2:381
Daughy, J.D., 1:173
David, R.B., 4:27
David, R.D., 3:255
Davies, B.L., 5:165
Davis, B.E., 4:379
Daykhovsky, L., 4:365
Debruyne, F.M.J., 4:353, 4:399
DeGennaro, M., 3:381
Deguchi, N., 1:227
Dejler, S.W., 3:43
Dennis, P.J., 4:331
Denstedt, J.D., 3:265, 3:307, 3:425, 4:79, 4:301
DeRiese, W., 5:205
Dessouki, T., 5:223
Deutz, F.J., 2:215

- Devonec, M., 3:109, 5:129
 Diaz-Ramirez, F., 4:371
 Dierks, S.M., 4:247, 5:117
 DiGirolamo, V., 1:197
 Dippel, W., 5:17
 DiSilverio, F., 3:381, 5:49
 Djamilian, M., 5:205
 Doblhofer, F., 4:385
 Donnell, R., 5:83
 Dorey, F.O., 4:71
 Dovenias, R., 4:117
 Dowd, J.B., 5:99
 Doyle, C.J., 5:241
 Drach, G.W., 4:315
 Drago, J.R., 2:235, 3:47
 Dreesen, R.G., 5:341
 Dresner, M.L., 2:253, 3:405
 Dretler, S.P., 1:9, 2:31, 2:123, 3:77, 3:301, 3:433
 Drudi, F.M., 5:225
 Dunnick, N.R., 1:45
 Dunthorn, M., 3:355
 Durand, F., 4:241
 Durso, J., 3:85
 Dyer, R.B., 2:287, 5:311
- E**
 Eberhart, R.C., 4:283
 Egawa, S., 3:147
 Eisenberger, F., 2:173, 2:193, 2:375
 El-Akkad, M.A., 3:91
 Elbers, J., 1:19, 2:83
 El-Damanhoury, H., 5:37, 5:213
 El Gammal, M., 4:15
 El Hilali, M.M., 4:15
 El-Kappany, H., 2:263
 Ellis, D.S., 1:81
 Ellis, J., 2:151
 Ercole, C., 3:219
 Erdman, W.A., 4:407
 Eriksson, T.J.A., 2:361
 Eshghi, M., 1:107, 3:85
 Evan, A.P., 1:89, 5:25
 Evans, R., 3:85
- F**
 Fain, J., 5:337
 Feagins, B.A., 4:347, 5:273
 Fegan, J.E., 5:273
 Fehring, K., 2:375
 Fermon, C.M., 5:317
 Fernandez, R., 1:107
 Ferrante, S., 5:317
 Figenschau, R.S., 5:357
 Finlayson, B., 1:81, 1:189, 3:355
 Fischer, N., 2:215
 Fishman, I.J., 3:185
 Fleenor, S., 2:151
 Fleischmann, J.D., 5:237
 Floth, A., 3:51, 4:49
 Fogarty, T.J., 3:63
 Foster, R.S., 5:341
 Fowler, J.E., 5:345
 Francesca, F., 1:197
 Franco, I., 3:85
 Franklin, T.D., 2:221
- Fry, F.J., 2:221
 Fuchs, A.M., 2:19, 2:341, 4:337, 5:45
 Fuchs, G.J., 1:1, 2:19, 2:117, 2:341, 3:255, 4:337, 5:45, 5:337
- G**
 Gagliardini, M.A., 3:401
 Gallucci, M., 3:381, 5:49
 Garner, J.J., 1:235
 Garvin, T.J., 3:307
 Gebhardt, T., 3:337, 5:17
 Gee, W.F., 4:67
 Geier, G.E., 2:221
 Geisinger, M.A., 1:253
 Gelet, A., 5:223
 Gerber, G.S., 5:297, 5:333
 Germinale, F., 2:1, 2:47, 3:367, 3:401, 4:241
 Ghoneim, M.A., 2:263
 Gianotti, I., 2:293
 Giesy, J.D., 3:63
 Glanz, S., 1:55
 Glassberg, K.I., 1:55
 Gleeson, M.J., 2:145, 3:1, 3:11
 Glickman, M.G., 1:243
 Gluck, C.D., 5:241
 Godec, C.J., 5:289
 Goldwasser, B.Z., 1:45
 Goodwin, W.E., 5:185
 Gordon, D.H., 1:55
 Graf, A.H., 2:67
 Graff, J., 3:315
 Grasso, M., 3:91, 4:155, 4:229
 Green, D.F., 1:243
 Greenberg, I.M., 1:85
 Greenberg, R.W., 5:197
 Griffin, A., 2:287
 Griffith, D.P., 1:99, 2:145, 3:1, 3:11, 3:355, 5:315
 Griffith, S.L., 2:221
 Grimm, P.D., 3:209
 Grunberger, I., 5:289
 Grundfest, W., 4:365
 Gschwend, J., 5:51
 Guarneri, A., 5:61
 Guiliani, L., 2:1
 Gulhan, A., 2:215
- H**
 Hakeem, H., 5:307
 Harmon, E., 5:41, 5:217
 Harrison, L.H., 2:287, 5:145, 5:311
 Hart, L.J., 5:145
 Hartung, R., 4:61, 4:169
 Hassouna, M., 4:15
 Hata, M., 1:227
 Hauri, D., 2:205
 Hautmann, R.E., 2:113, 2:131, 3:287, 3:295, 5:51
 Hawkins, I.F., 1:235
 Hellgren, E., 2:137
 Hendrikx, A.J.M., 4:353, 4:399
 Hermann, G.D., 3:63
 Hernandez-Graulau, J., 2:11
 Herwig, K., 4:183
 Hibberd, R.D., 5:165
- Hick, J., 4:375
 Higashihara, E., 4:361
 Himpens, J.M., 5:1
 Hlavinka, T., 5:41, 5:217
 Hockley, N.M., 3:273
 Hodge, G.B., 3:167
 Hofmann, R., 4:169
 Hofstetter, A.G., 1:115, 4:161
 Hohenfellner, R., 5:37, 5:213
 Horan, J.J., 4:93
 Horgan, J.I., 1:275
 Horwitz, C.A., 3:155
 Hoskins, M.W., 3:63
 Hrebinko, R.L., 5:327
 Hübner, W., 4:61
 Hulbert, J.C., 2:11, 3:219
 Humble, L., 1:165
 Hunter, D.W., 2:11
 Hunter, P.T., 3:167
 Husmann, D.A., 5:273
 Hutchinson, C.L., 3:273
 Hutchinson, J., 3:167
- I**
 Ido, K., 4:253
 Ieda, K., 5:245
 Igel, T.C., 3:193
 Ikeda, R., 3:69
 Inazaki, S., 5:245
 Inglis, J.A., 2:27, 2:59
 Isa, W.A., 5:201
 Ison, K.T., 2:321
- J**
 Jacobs, S.C., 3:81, 4:223
 Jaeger, P., 2:205
 Janetschek, G., 2:67
 Jarowenko, M.V., 4:331
 Jenkins, A.D., 2:41
 Jimenez, T., 2:63
 Jipp, P., 2:375
 Jitsukawa, S., 1:227
 Jocham, D., 2:157
 Jonas, V., 5:205
 Jorion, J.L., 3:59
 Jun, W.K., 2:55
- K**
 Kaack, B., 2:141
 Kaack, M.B., 5:41
 Kadmon, D., 3:185
 Kameyama, S., 4:361
 Kandel, G., 2:367
 Kandel, L.B., 2:189
 Kaplan, J., 4:365
 Kaplan, L., 4:365
 Kapoor, D.A., 5:229
 Karlin, G.S., 1:49, 1:85, 2:35
 Katz, G., 4:235
 Kavoussi, L.R., 4:247
 Kaye, K.W., 3:103, 3:155
 Keeler, L.L., 4:91
 Kempson, S.A., 1:89
 Kennedy, T.J., 1:31, 1:75
 Kerbl, K., 4:315

- Khalaf, I., 2:345
 Khanna, O.P., 5:251
 Kielczewski, P., 2:151
 Kikuchi, M., 5:245
 Kinn, A.C., 5:351
 Kivisaari, A.O., 2:77
 Kivasaari, L.M., 2:77
 Klee, L.W., 5:341
 Klein, L.A., 4:183, 5:109
 Klimberg, I.W., 1:235
 Knipper, A., 4:161
 Koch, J., 5:195
 Koebert, R., 4:223
 Komine, Y., 5:245
 Korth, K., 4:109, 5:151
 Kramolowsky, E.V., 2:271
 Kranc, D.M., 5:297
 Kreder, K.J., 2:253
 Kremens, P., 1:169
 Kromann-Anderson, B., 5:329
 Krongrad, A., 5:209
 Kuenkel, M., 4:109
 Kumari-Subaiya, S., 2:389
 Kunisch, M., 5:37, 5:213
 Kupin, W., 2:241
 Kwon, E.D., 3:201
- L**
- Ladner, W., 5:317
 Laffey, K.J., 1:153
 Lanchares, E., 4:269
 Lange, P.H., 3:227
 Laor, E., 5:7
 Laudone, V., 2:41
 Laungani, G.B., 5:289
 Lawson, R.K., 3:81, 4:223
 Lee, F., 3:125
 Lee, K.K., 4:123
 Lee, W.J., 1:49, 1:275, 2:35
 Lehtonen, T.A., 2:77
 Lepor, H., 5:83
 LeRoy, A.J., 1:177, 2:257, 4:265
 Letourneau, J.G., 3:219
 Li, W.J., 5:145
 Lieck, P., 3:439
 Liedl, B., 2:157
 Lierz, M.F., 4:379
 Linde, H.W., 5:345
 Lindell, O.I., 2:77
 Lingeman, J.E., 1:89, 1:201, 2:163, 2:189, 3:245, 3:273, 5:25
 Lipman, R., 4:129
 Lippert, M., 2:283
 Littleton, R.H., 2:241
 Locke, R., 1:189, 1:235
 Loening, S.A., 3:201
 López, J.A., 4:269
 Long, S.R., 4:247, 4:301, 5:117
 Loughlin, K.R., 5:241
 Ludwig, J.J., 4:183
 Lunz, C., 2:157
 Lutzeyer, W., 2:215
 Lyon, E.S., 5:297
- M**
- Macchia, R.J., 5:289
 Madorsky, M., 1:81
 Maffezzini, M., 1:197
 Maggass, G.A., 4:375
 Maghraby, H., 4:161
 Maguet, J.H., 3:109
 Maldonado, J.R., 5:7
 Mancebo, J.M., 1:223
 Mandarin-DeLacerda, C.A., 2:247
 Maddressi, A., 5:61
 Manganini, V., 5:323
 Mankinen, P.J., 2:27
 Manne, J., 4:3, 5:105, 5:283
 Manzone, D.J., 2:107
 Marcus, M., 4:301
 Marich, K.W., 5:289
 Marini, F., 5:323
 Marino, C., 5:317
 Martin, E.C., 1:153
 Martin, X., 5:223
 Martino, F., 5:323
 Marumo, K., 1:227
 Massarra, J., 1:223
 Masuda, T., 4:253
 Mate, T.P., 3:209
 Matzkin, H., 4:199
 Maynard, M., 2:271
 Mazza, L., 5:61
 McAleer, J.A., 1:89, 5:25
 McClennan, B.L., 2:177, 3:265, 3:307
 McCullough, D.L., 5:145
 McDougall, E.M., 3:265, 4:79
 McDougall, L.L., 4:307
 McHugh, T.A., 3:125
 McLeary, R.D., 3:125
 McMurphy, J.M., 1:145
 McNamara, T.C., 4:71
 McNicholas, T., 1:137
 Mellinger, B., 2:389
 Melman, A., 5:7
 Melser, M., 2:241
 Menchi, I., 4:193
 Meretyk, S., 4:235, 4:247, 5:117, 5:277
 Mertens, M., 1:169
 Michaels, E.K., 5:345
 Middleton, R.G., 2:403
 Miller, B.A., 2:309
 Miller, G.L., 4:407
 Miller, K., 2:113, 2:131, 3:295, 5:51
 Miller, R.A., 1:137
 Milroy, E., 5:75
 Milsten, R.E., 4:71
 Mininberg, D.T., 3:385
 Minowada, S., 4:361
 Mitty, H.A., 2:279, 2:407
 Moneim, A.A., 2:345
 Monsallier, M., 3:109
 Montanari, E., 5:61
 Moran, M.E., 4:315
 Moroni, F., 4:193
 Morris, J.S., 4:407
 Morvant, A., 5:217
 Mosley, C.R., 3:193
 Moss, J., 5:345
 Motola, J.A., 5:317
 Mouriquand, P., 3:109
 Muller, H.M., 2:215
 Munch, L.C., 3:411
 Munshi, C., 4:223
 Murai, M., 5:245
 Muschter, R., 4:161
- N**
- Nabeeh, A., 2:263
 Nagakura, K., 5:245
 Naidich, J.B., 5:197
 Nakagawa, M., 5:245
 Nakamura, H., 5:245
 Nardoza, A., 2:293
 Naude, J.H., 2:395
 Neal, D.E., 5:41, 5:217
 Neisius, D., 3:337, 5:17
 Nelson, C.M.K., 2:271
 Nelson, J.H., 2:235
 Nepute, J.Q., 4:259
 Nesbitt, J.A., 2:235, 3:47
 Newman, D.M., 1:201, 2:163, 2:189, 2:221, 3:245
 Newman, R.C., 1:189, 3:355
 Ng, W.S., 5:165
 Nielson, K.K., 5:329
 Nilsson, T., 2:23
 Nissenkorn, I.S., 5:79
 Nitti, V.W., 5:289
 Noble, M.J., 4:379
 Nord, R.G., 5:13
 Nordling, J., 5:329
 Norman, R.W., 3:31
- O**
- O'Brien, W.M., 1:169, 4:93
 O'Connor, K.P., 4:393
 Ohkuma, K., 4:253
 Ohlsén, H., 5:351
 Oosterhof, G.O.N., 4:353
 Opsomer, R.J., 3:59
 Oukheira, H., 3:109
 Ovesen, H., 5:329
- P**
- Pahlira, J.J., 1:169, 3:43, 4:93, 4:393
 Palmer, J.O., 1:19
 Papadopoulos, I., 4:55
 Parr, N.J., 4:323
 Pastor, J., 3:315
 Patel, A., 5:137
 Patterson, D.E., 1:177, 2:257, 4:265
 Pauer, W., 4:385
 Paulson, D.F., 5:251
 Pearson, T.C., 4:67
 Pedersen, J.J., 2:361
 Pedro, M., 5:57
 Pensel, J., 3:439
 Perez, J.F., 2:235
 Pérez-Castro, E., 1:223, 5:157
 Perez-Marrero, R., 4:183
 Perrin, P., 3:109, 5:129
 Persechino, F., 5:49
 Perugia, G.S., 5:225
 Pettersson, B., 3:19, 3:391
 Pfab, R., 4:61
 Pfitzner, K., 5:213
 Pintauro, W.L., 1:205

Pisani, E., 5:61
 Pletzer, K., 5:17
 Pliskin, M.J., 3:405
 Pond, H.S., 3:193
 Pontremoli, P., 3:401
 Politis, G.M., 1:99
 Pollack, H.M., 4:129, 5:233
 Porpaczy, P., 4:61
 Pottomvils, G., 5:301
 Poulsen, A.L., 5:329
 Preminger, G.M., 1:31, 1:75, 1:145, 3:265,
 3:321, 4:135, 4:283, 4:407, 4:347, 5:161,
 5:273
 Priestley, J.B., 4:375, 4:389, 5:255
 Pry, R.J., 1:235
 Pryor, J., 2:283
 Pumphrey, J.A., 4:175
 Puppo, P., 2:1, 2:47, 3:367, 3:401, 4:241
 Purcell, M.H., 4:259
 Pye, S.D., 4:323

Q

Quesada, E.T., 5:315

R

Ragde, H., 3:115, 3:137, 3:209
 Ramos, M.E., 1:209
 Ramsay, J., 1:137
 Ramsay, J.W.A., 5:137
 Rannenbaum, M., 5:209
 Rannikko, S.S., 2:77
 Rassweiler, J., 2:173, 2:193, 2:375
 Ravalli, R., 5:105
 Ray, P.S., 5:251
 Reddy, P.K., 1:269, 5:93, 5:137, 5:229
 Redha, F., 2:205
 Reichel, E., 4:169
 Reid, B.J., 3:43
 Reid, R.E., 5:7
 Resnick, M.L., 3:177
 Ricciotti, G., 2:1, 2:47, 3:367, 3:381, 3:401,
 4:241
 Ricciuti, G.P., 5:49
 Rich, M.A., 1:49, 4:117
 Richardson, M.E., 5:217
 Riehle, R.A., 1:37
 Rigati, P., 1:197
 Risius, B., 1:253
 Ritchie, A.W.S., 4:323
 Rittenberg, M.H., 1:161
 Roberts, J., 2:141
 Robles, J.E., 5:201
 Rodan, B.A., 1:173
 Rohner, T.J., 4:331
 Rosell, D., 5:201
 Rosen, D.I., 3:433
 Rosenblum, J.L., 1:123
 Ross, L., 2:367
 Royer, P., 5:137
 Rubben, H., 2:215
 Rubio, E., 4:269
 Rüschoff, J., 5:51
 Rutherford, C.L., 3:193
 Rutner, A.B., 2:55
 Ryan, K.J., 4:37
 Ryan, R.C., 2:181

S

Sabha, M., 2:23
 Sadi, M.V., 2:293
 Saffioti, S., 3:401
 Salmeri, S.A., 3:401
 Saltzman, B., 1:205, 4:279, 5:209
 Sampain, F.J.B., 2:247
 Sanchez, P.L., 5:201
 Sanchez de Badajoz, E., 4:371, 5:157
 Sandock, D., 4:315
 Saslawsky, M., 2:367
 Sauter, T., 3:287, 3:295
 Scardino, P.T., 3:147, 5:251
 Schacht, M., 2:367
 Schaub, T., 5:37, 5:213
 Schiff, S.F., 2:31
 Schild, H., 5:37, 5:213
 Schlick, R., 5:205
 Schmidt, A., 2:173, 2:375
 Schmidt, J.D., 3:37
 Schmidt-Kloiber, H., 4:169
 Schmiedt, E., 2:157
 Schmitter, S.P., 3:125
 Schmitz-Drager, B., 5:293
 Schoborg, T.W., 3:361
 Schwalb, D., 3:85
 Schüller, J., 3:439
 Schumacher, D., 3:209
 Schuster, C., 2:157
 Schwentker, F.N., 5:327
 Scott, J.W., 1:201, 2:163
 Seibold, J., 2:173, 2:375
 Seitz, G., 3:337, 5:17
 Selikowitz, S.M., 2:55
 Seline, P., 2:83
 Selli, C., 1:249, 4:193
 Senge, T., 3:315
 Segura, J.W., 1:177
 Shabsigh, R., 2:145, 3:185
 Shafik, A., 5:21
 Shalaby, M., 3:99
 Shapiro, A., 4:235
 Sheline, M.E., 4:129, 5:233
 Sheridan, M.J., 3:43
 Shiraiwa, K., 3:69
 Shortliffe, L.D., 3:375
 Siders, D.B., 3:125
 Siegel, S.W., 1:253
 Sigman, M., 2:41
 Siragusa, R.J., 1:235
 Sloane, B., 2:141
 Smiley, D., 5:229
 Smith, A.D., 1:23, 1:49, 1:85, 1:123, 1:275,
 2:35, 2:319, 2:355, 3:219, 3:375, 4:1,
 5:105, 5:113, 5:317
 Smith, J.A., 2:403, 5:251
 Smith, J.J., 5:99
 Smith, R.B., 5:251
 Snyder, J.A., 1:123
 Snyder, H.M., 3:375
 Sohn, M., 2:215
 Sommer, K., 3:439
 Sonda, L.P., 2:151
 Soper, N.J., 4:247
 Sotolongo, J.R., 1:205
 Spires, S.M., 4:67

Spirnak, J.P., 5:237
 Stadtbäumer, M., 5:37, 5:213
 Stein, A., 5:289
 Stein, B.S., 2:299
 Steinbock, G.S., 2:333, 4:175
 Stenzl, A., 2:19, 2:117
 Stief, C., 5:205
 Stillwell, T.J., 2:257
 Stoller, M.L., 3:51, 4:49
 Stone, A.M., 5:357
 Stone, N.N., 5:251
 Störkel, S., 5:37, 5:213
 Stormont, T.J., 4:265
 Streem, S.B., 1:253
 Strohmaier, W.L., 5:57, 5:195
 Sugiura, K., 4:253
 Sutton, A., 2:35
 Suzuki, K., 3:69
 Swartz, R.C.E., 2:361
 Sylvester, J., 3:209

T

Tachibana, M., 1:227
 Taily, G.G., 2:71, 5:1
 Tanaka, T., 3:69
 Taniguchi, T., 3:69
 Tannenbaum, M., 5:209
 Tazaki, H., 1:227, 4:253
 Terry, W.J., 3:193
 Thelen, M., 5:37, 5:213
 Thomas, R., 2:141, 5:41, 5:217
 Tiala, E.K., 2:77
 Timoney, A.G., 5:165
 Tiselius, H.G., 2:137, 3:19, 3:391
 Tolley, D.A., 2:27, 2:59, 4:323
 Tolia, B.M., 5:7
 Tomera, K.M., 2:189
 Torp-Pedersen, S., 3:125
 Train, J.S., 2:279, 2:407
 Trinchieri, A., 5:61
 Tsugawa, R., 3:69
 Tucker, R.D., 2:271
 Tuong, W., 1:107

U

Uchibori, M., 5:245
 Uhlschmid, G., 2:205

V

Valdivia, J.G., 4:269
 Valente, R., 5:323
 Valer, J., 4:269
 Van Arsdalen, K.N., 3:375, 4:129
 Van Cangh, P.J., 3:59
 VanDeursen, H., 5:301
 Vara-Thorbeck, C., 4:371
 Vaughan, E.D., 1:37
 Venable, D.D., 1:165
 Verstanding, A., 4:235
 Villarroya, S., 4:269
 Vögeli, T., 5:293

W

Wakaki, M., 5:245
 Waldbaum, R.S., 5:197
 Wall, I., 2:137

- Wand, H., 4:55
Wang, S., 2:151
Wang, N.S., 4:15
Wasserman, N., 1:269
Wassinger, W., 1:19
Watson, G., 1:119
Weber, H.M., 5:51
Webster, G.D., 4:149
Weinberg, J.J., 2:355
Weinberg, R., 5:317
Weinerth, J.L., 1:45, 1:181, 2:381, 4:149
Weinstein, D., 4:279
Weiss, J.N., 2:389, 5:105, 5:113
Weiss, R.M., 1:243
Wese, F.X., 3:59
Westhauser, A., 2:153
Wheeler, J.S., 4:217
Wheeler, T.M., 3:147
Whelan, J.P., 1:189
Wick, M.R., 5:357
Wickham, J.E.A., 1:71, 1:119, 1:137,
2:309, 2:321, 5:165
Wikert, G.A., 2:253, 3:405
Wiksell, H., 5:351
Wilbert, D.M., 5:57, 5:195
Willis, L.R., 5:25
Willscher, M.K., 4:97
Wilson, W.T., 4:135, 4:283, 4:347, 4:407
Windsor, R.B., 4:331
Winfield, H.N., 4:37
Wirth, B., 4:55
Wise, H.A., 2:235
Wise, K.L., 4:143
Wolfson, B.A., 5:45
Woodruff, R.D., 5:145
Y
Yachia, D., 2:385
Yip, Y.L., 5:155
Yoshimura, K., 4:253
Z
Zaccara, A., 3:381
Zagoria, R.J., 5:311
Zanetti, G., 5:61
Zaontz, M.R., 1:261
Zelch, M.G., 1:253
Ziegler, M., 3:337
Zudaire, J.J., 5:201

Reduction of Cost of Dornier HM3 Treatment by Using Refurbished Electrodes

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ABSTRACT

Patients with urolithiasis were randomly assigned to treatment with either original (N = 138) or refurbished (N = 125) electrodes on the Dornier HM3 lithotripter. There were no significant differences in stone burden, position, or radiopacity; frequency of pretreatment stent insertion; or generator voltage and number of shock waves in the two groups. The immediate success rates for renal pelvis stones were 77% in both groups; the rates of caliceal stones were 88% (original electrodes) and 83% (refurbished electrodes) and the rates for ureteral stones 72% (original electrodes) and 80% (refurbished electrodes). These differences were not statistically significant. It should be possible to reduce the cost of extracorporeal lithotripsy without compromise of treatment quality by using refurbished electrodes.

INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST CLINICAL DESTRUCTION of a renal stone by extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (SWL) was performed in the early 1980s in Munich.¹ During the ensuing years, SWL has become the most common procedure for the treatment of urolithiasis as the indications have been extended to encompass more than 90% of all stones, including those in the middle and lower ureter.²

Lingeman et al³ estimated the costs of the various treatments for urolithiasis in the United States in 1984 and 1985 and found that SWL was less expensive than open surgery or percutaneous nephrolithotomy (PNL). However, SWL and PNL were nearly the same cost, and the groups of patients treated with the two methods proved not to be comparable. Moreover, the different stone positions and the details of the effectiveness of treatment were not reported. Despite numerous publications concerning the clinical results of SWL, little information is available on the cost-effectiveness ratio.

With modified generator systems, it has become possible to provide anesthesia-free SWL for outpatients with a reduction in the cost, which might be of special interest in the US. In Germany, a reduction of the cost with this type of treatment has not been achievable so far.⁴ According to a new refurbishment

process developed by Retrode, Inc. (Kennesaw, GA), the tips of the lithotripter electrodes are checked by a special optical device. The gap distance is corrected to within 0.0004 inch, and the FI position and coaxial alignment are restored. The refurbishing process consists of more than 40 individual steps (Fig. 1). We undertook this study to determine whether the cost-effectiveness of a spark-gap lithotripsy system could be increased by using recycled electrodes without compromise of treatment effectiveness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Patients (N = 263) were randomly assigned to two groups, one (Group 1) being treated with the original electrodes (OE) and the other (Group 2) with refurbished electrodes (RE). The average age of the 138 patients in Group 1 was 56 years (range 19–81) (Table 1). Five patients suffered from inadequate disintegration of a stone during previous SWL. The average age of the 125 patients in Group 2 was 54 years (range 19–84). Four had previously undergone SWL and had residual concretions. Statistically, there were no significant differences between the two groups in stone mass, stone position, or radiopacity of the stones.

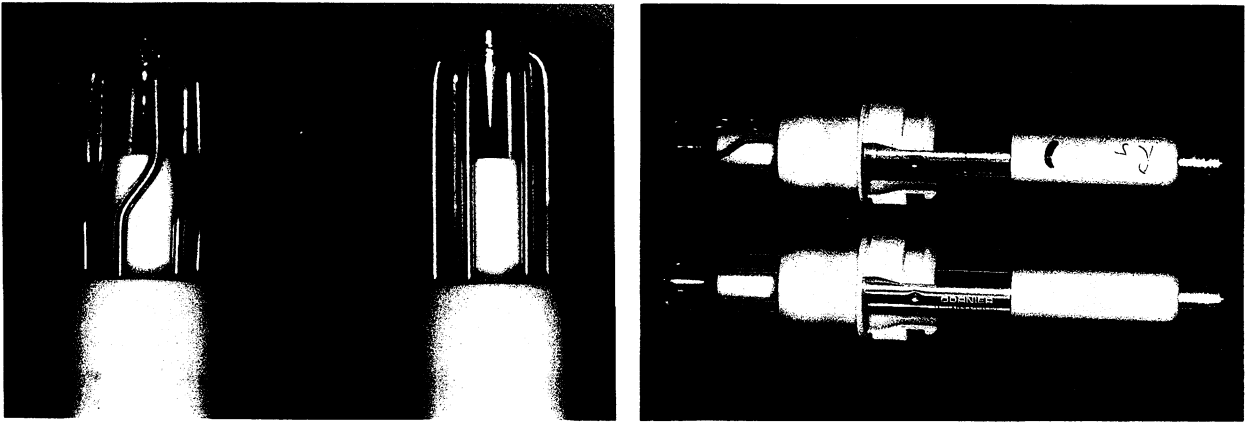


FIG. 1. Tips of electrodes and electrodes complete (refurbished electrode left resp. above).

All patients underwent SWL with the Dornier HM3. The urologist in charge of the treatment did not know whether an OE or an RE was used. In both groups, PDA anesthesia was used in about 60% of cases (81 in Group 1 and 77 in Group 2). Auxilliary stenting was necessary before SWL in about 40% of both groups either because of obstruction (15 patients in Group 1, 12 in Group 2) or because of the large stone mass (41 and 40 patients, respectively). Documentation of the treatment result was done by plain film no later than 12 hours after SWL. Evaluation of the films was performed by a physician without knowledge of the electrode used. The outcome was rated very good if all fragments were <3 mm, good if all fragments were <5 mm, and poor if fragments >5 mm were seen.

RESULTS

Experimental Studies

In vitro experiments with a standardized stone model showed identical performance of the OE and RE in stone destruction (Fig. 2). The usable life-cycles of the two types were likewise found to be similar (Fig. 3). The pressure profiles at F2 were within the standard 10% to 15% statistical variation (Fig. 4).

Clinical Findings

There were no statistically significant differences in number of shock waves and generator voltage needed in the two groups (Table 2). Patients who had already been treated with SWL were not studied further because of their small number. With the OE, good to very good destruction was obtained in 80% of stones overall (Table 2). Insufficient destruction was seen for two renal pelvic, one caliceal, and three ureteral stones (4.5% of the total). With the RE, good to very good destruction was seen in 81% overall. Poor results were obtained with only two pelvic, one caliceal, and three ureteral stones (5%). Statistically, there were no significant differences.

DISCUSSION

Originally and today, electrodes are a source of additional cost in extracorporeal systems. For this reason, alternatives, including new machine designs, have been sought. One possibility is to recycle burned out electrodes, but if this is done, one should demand of the manufacturer a guarantee that the performance and effectiveness are similar to that of the originals.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF STONE DISEASE IN TREATED PATIENTS

Site	Group 1 (OE)		Group 2 (RE)	
	No.	Mean Size (Range) (mm)	No.	Mean Size (Range) (mm)
Renal pelvis	35	12.9 (5-24)	31	12.6 (5-25)
Calices	59	12.1 (5-25)	55	12.3 (5-40)
Ureter	39	8.9 (5-13)	35	8.2 (5-15)

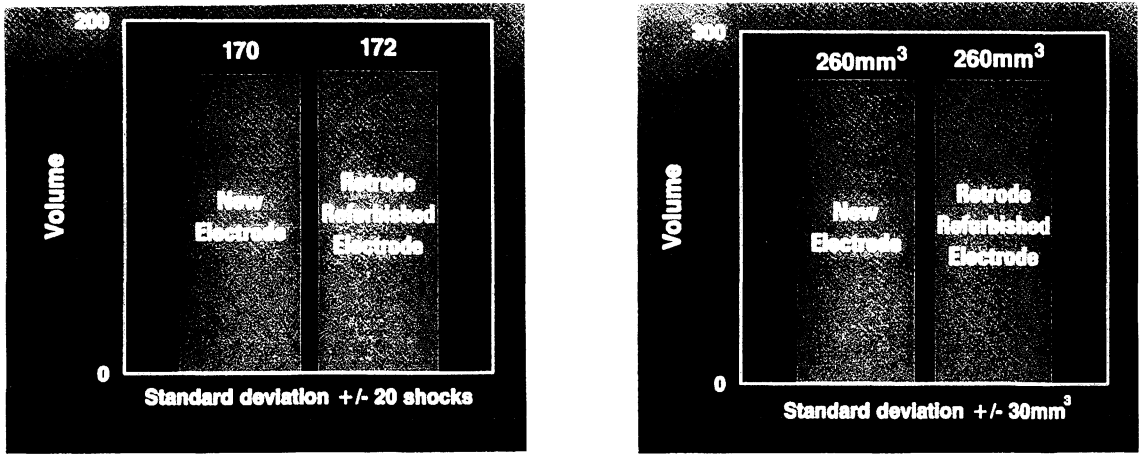


FIG. 2. In vitro fragmentation comparison. A. Number of shocks needed to destroy 12-mm spherical test stone ($1.0 \times 1.4\text{ mm}$) completely. B. Crater volume produced in test stone by 100 shocks at 24 kV (40 nF) generator voltage. (Courtesy of Retrode, Inc.)

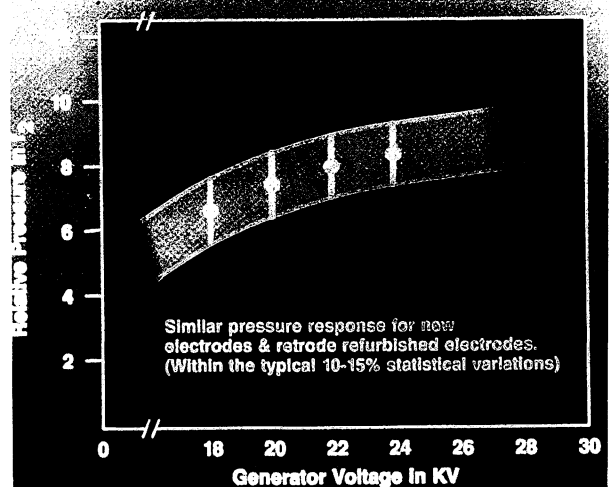
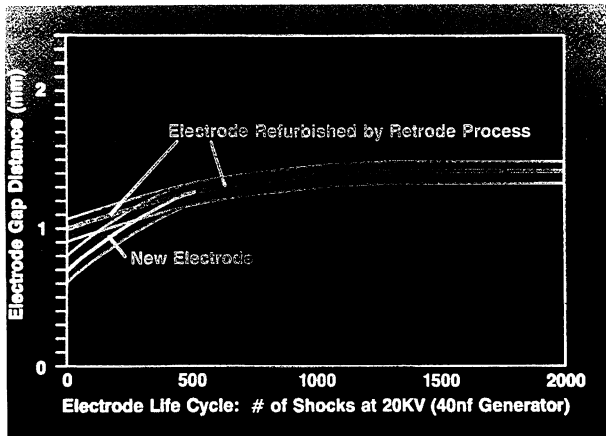


FIG. 3. Life cycles of new and refurbished electrodes. (Courtesy of Retrode, Inc.)

FIG. 4. Pressure profiles at F2 for new and refurbished electrodes. (Courtesy of Retrode, Inc.)

TABLE 2. TREATMENT DETAILS IN TWO GROUPS

	OE		RE	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
Renal pelvic stones				
Generator voltage (IcV)	22	18-24	22	18-24
No. of shock waves	2983	1800-3000	2915	1500-3000
Immediate success (%)*	77		77	
Caliceal stones				
Generator voltage (IcV)	22	18-24	22	18-24
No. of shock waves	2501	1500-3000	2552	1500-3000
Immediate success (%)	88		83	
Ureteral stones				
Generator voltage (IcV)	23	18-24	22	18-24
No. of shock waves	2652	1000-3000	2673	1000-3000
Immediate success (%)	72		80	

*Good or very good fragmentation.

This first clinical study using refurbished electrodes showed similar effectiveness in stone destruction both experimentally and clinically. Problems such as ghost ignition, isolation melt-down, and cracking were not seen. Considering the relative costs of new and refurbished electrodes, a cost reduction of 30% to 40% can be obtained with recycled electrodes without impairing the quality of treatment. Thus, the idea of reducing costs by using refurbished electrodes is not utopian any more.

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