50th anniversary of the modern use of intravenous regional anaesthesia

2013 marks 50 years since the publication of C. McK. Holmes’ practice-changing publication *Intravenous Regional Analgesia: A useful method of producing analgesia of the limbs*.1

This article led to world-wide use of the technique, first described by August Bier in 1908, of producing regional neural blockade by injection of local anaesthetic into a tourniquetted limb.

The importance of intravenous regional anaesthesia (IVRA, also known as ‘Bier’s block’) rests in its relative simplicity, and safety—especially compared with general anaesthesia.1,2

After reading of Bier’s original report, Dr Holmes undertook preliminary research into the technique in the early 1960s while an Anaesthetic Registrar at Dunedin Hospital. He followed this with further work at Oxford while a Nuffield Dominion Scholar (at the same time that Sir Robert Macintosh, a fellow New Zealander and inventor of the Macintosh laryngoscope, held the inaugural Nuffield professorship).3

Today with a slight change in terminology from the original article, intravenous regional anaesthesia is still widely used and valued for the rapid, safe, and effective anaesthesia it provides.2

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August Bier (1861–1949)  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons public domain)  

Mack Holmes (1935–)  

Intravenous regional anaesthesia procedure  
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References: