Spring is in the air!

British summertime officially started on the 31st March and we can now look forward to longer brighter evenings. April also marks for some the start of a new leave calendar which means we can start planning holidays and long weekends.

I have a friend who keeps an electric heating blanket on their bed all year round, a bit extreme even for Northern Ireland, but to be fair I think they might have a thyroid problem. I have often toyed with the idea of an electric blanket, but have never succumbed. However, with the delights of the menopause and the accompanying hot flushes, I am not convinced that such a purchase would be a useful commodity to aid my now erratic sleep pattern.

In this month’s journal, Noriyoshi Tanaka et al.‘s paper compared resistive heating and convective warming and found no difference in either means to maintaining core body temperature. Unobserved perioperative hypothermia can lead to many serious consequences including adverse cardiac outcomes, increased blood loss, wound infections and prolonged hospital admissions. As perioperative practitioners we have a duty of care to our patients to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to monitor and maintain core body temperature within acceptable limits. This study provides practitioners with the evidence that can help inform and support their choice of warming intervention used in their operating theatre or recovery department.

My last thought is the significance of these words said to me in conversation by a volunteer with Age Concern, “It’s hard for most people to get warm once they get really cold”. Often in healthcare and surgery we have to be reactive to events, but we also have a responsibility to be proactive in our actions.

Take a look at your current warming systems are they effective? Consider your documentation; does it effectively capture the care and evaluation given in relation to maintaining perioperative normothermia? When did you last undertake an audit that included patients’ body temperature pre and post-surgical intervention?

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