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Page 1

Medtronic Exhibit 1462

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George Sternbach, MD  
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# The Journal of Emergency Medicine

Volume 5, Number 6

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## CONTENTS

NOV 13 1987

*Original Contributions*

**George T. Rodeheaver**  
**Michael D. Spengler**  
**Richard F. Edlich**

451 Performance of New Wound Closure Tapes

**David Schillinger**

463 Nifedipine in Hypertensive Emergencies: A Prospective Study

*Clinical Communications*

**Joseph C. Dell'Aria**

475 Acute Pseudotumor of the Orbit

**Brian O. Stephens**  
**Gail V. Anderson, Jr**

481 Simultaneous Bilateral Quadriceps Tendon Rupture: A Case Report and Subject Review

**Paul S. Auerbach**  
**J. Taylor Hays**

487 Erythema Nodosum Following a Jellyfish Sting

**Eric M. Koscove**

493 Taser® Dart Ingestion

*Selected Topics: Toxicology*

**Kurt R. Duffens**  
**Martin J. Smilkstein**  
**Howard A. Bessen**  
**Barry H. Rumack**

499 Falsely Elevated Salicylate Levels Due to Diflunisal Overdose

*Selected Topics: Prehospital Care*

**John L. Zautcke**  
**Ron W. Lee**  
**Nancie A. Ethington**

505 Paramedic Skill Decay

**James E. Pointer**  
**Michael A. Osur**

513 EMS Quality Assurance: A Computerized Incident Reporting System

*Selected Topics: ECG Commentary*

**Steven R. Lowenstein**  
**Alden H. Harken**

519 A Wide, Complex Look at Cardiac Dysrhythmias

(Continued on next page)

INDEXED IN Safety Science Abstracts, Emergency Medical Abstracts, BIOSIS Database, Index Medicus, MEDLINE, Excerpta Medica, CABS, Internat'l Bibl Period Lit, Internat'l Book Reviews

ISSN 0736-4679  
(716)

Page 3

Medtronic Exhibit 1462

<b>Timothy C. Evans</b>	549	Airplane Propellers and Cynicism
		<i>Editorials</i>
<b>George Sternbach</b>	551	"Tasering" the Literature
<b>D. Demetrios Zukin</b>	553	New Wound Closure Tapes
<b>Mary Ann Cooper</b>	555	Cost Ignorance: Not Cost Containment
	557	<b>Letters to the Editor</b>
	561	<b>Letters of Reply</b>
		<i>Education</i>
<b>Raymond P. Ten Eyck</b> <b>Joshua S. Vayer</b>	563	Airway Management: A New Look at Old Models
		<i>Administration of Emergency Medicine</i>
<b>John L. Lyman</b> <b>John B. McCabe</b>	567	Emergency Department Care: Cost Awareness by Health Care Providers
	573	<b>Abstracts</b>
		<i>Book Review</i>
<b>Patrick Fennell</b> <b>Susan Wason</b>	581	<i>Handbook of Common Poisonings in Children</i> , 2nd Ed by American Academy of Pediatrics
	583	<b>Calendar of Events</b>
	585	<b>Classifieds</b>
	587	<b>List of Reviewers</b>
	589	<b>Volume 5 Index</b>
	607	<b>Instructions for Contributors</b>

This issue of *JEM* was edited by Dr George Sternbach, Associate Editor.

## J.- F.- B. CHARRIÈRE: THE MAN BEHIND THE “FRENCH” GAUGE

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□ **Abstract**—Joseph-Frédéric-Benoît Charrière, a 19th century Parisian maker of surgical instruments, has by virtue of his ingenuity and advanced thinking, continued to have his presence felt in medicine throughout the 20th century. His most significant accomplishment was the development of a uniform, standard gauge specifically designed for use in medical equipment such as catheters and probes. Unlike the gauge system adopted by the British for measurement of needles and intravenous catheters, Charrière's system has uniform increments between gauge sizes (1/3 of a millimeter), is easily calculated in terms of its metric equivalent, and has no arbitrary upper end point. Today, in the United States, this system is commonly referred to as French (Fr) sizing. In addition to the development of the French gauge, Charrière made significant advances in ether administration, urologic, and other surgical instruments, and the development of the modern syringe.

□ **Keywords**—Charrière; French gauge; medical equipment; surgical equipment; ether anesthesia; urology

In the first half of the 19th century, the British, in the throes of the industrial revolution, were still trying to adapt an arbitrary sizing system (the Stub's Gauge which was adapted to the manufacture of needles and catheters only in the 20th century) in order to standardize their manu-

facture of metal wires.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the French had developed a uniform, standard gauge based on the metric system. This gauge was specifically designed for use in medical equipment, such as catheters and probes. The famous Parisian maker of surgical instruments, Joseph-Frédéric-Benoît Charrière (Figure 1), developed this measurement system. Today, in the United States, this system is commonly referred to as French (Fr) sizing.

Charrière was born in 1803 in Cerniat in Gruyere, Fribourg Canton, Switzerland. At the age of 13, he was sent to Paris and apprenticed as a cutler (a maker of cutting instruments, such as knives). Four years later he became both a master cutler and the owner of his own business after the untimely and mysterious drowning of his former teacher, whose business he acquired. Charrière quickly developed a reputation among Paris surgeons as a skilled and innovative maker of surgical instruments. Part of this reputation stemmed from an incident that occurred shortly after he opened his business.

Charrière was hammering the metal and sharpening the lancets and knives, when into his boutique flew a young man. By his white apron, his fine featured and intelligent face, and by his distinguished build he could recog-

**Medical Classics** — is an ongoing feature of *JEM*, focusing on “classic” contributions to emergency medicine. This section is routinely authored by *George Sternbach, MD* Stanford University Medical Center.

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