To the Editor,

With great interest, I read the article by Sahebjami and associates about the effects of enhanced external counterpulsation (EECP) in coronary artery disease patients with and without diabetes. Despite the encouraging results revealed in this study in nondiabetic patients, indicated as the reduction of pain frequencies, and despite the technology of EECP has been thoroughly refined since the early 1960s, EECP has had difficulty disseminating in routine clinical practice and remains ignored at many centers worldwide. Similarly, stem cell therapies, cardiac shock wave therapy, stellate ganglion blocks, spinal cord stimulation, and vascular endothelial growth factor gene therapy have failed to meet expectations. Only use of the coronary sinus reducer, in the past few years, seems to have spread more exuberantly; however, perhaps effective sponsoring by the stent industry has played a role behind its faster rise in popularity. Furthermore, apart from initial encouraging results, studies remain necessary before assessing this technology's mid- and long-term outcomes. In such a heterogeneous context of attempts to relieve refractory angina (RA), therapeutic occlusion of the internal mammary arteries (IMAs) has been proposed. In actuality, ligation of the IMAs was an established therapy for ischemic heart disease in the fifties, in an era during which the cardiopulmonary bypass machine was in its infancy and direct, on-pump coronary surgery did not exist. Access was via the third or fourth intercostal space bilaterally, with a small incision to reach the right and left IMAs at a point distal to the origin of the pericardiophrenic branch. Ligation was thought to divert blood flow to the heart via an anastomotic microvascular network. Although results in hundreds of patients were encouraging and some publications were outstanding, after the start of the cardiopulmonary bypass era, all debate regarding IMA occlusion ceased, and it fell into absolute oblivion for 50 years, until the principle was resurrected for no-option RA patients in 2010. Apart from the microvascular network studied by previous authors, we now have angiographic evidence that new collaterals can develop from the patent proximal stump of an IMA, occluded within its mid-distal segment, to reach ischemic heart; and that, sometimes, a branch may join a coronary artery directly. Hence, interventional therapy employing embolization or plug occlusion of an IMA has been proposed. The collateral flow index, fractional flow reserve, intracoronary ECG, and anginal symptoms have all been recently demonstrated to improve when the ipsilateral IMA is occluded. These recent findings confirm that the old principle of IMA occlusion had a strong rationale, and suggest that it would be worthwhile further studying its effects in RA.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.
Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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Submitted: 30-Aug-2019
Accepted: 26-Sep-2019  Published: 22-Jan-2021

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How to cite this article: Piciche M. Therapeutic occlusion of the internal mammary arteries to relieve refractory angina. Ann Card Anaesth 2021;24:115-6

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