

Handheld ultrasound: stethoscope retirement?

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Handheld ultrasound (HHU) machine is a pocket-sized, battery operated device limited to 2-dimensional and color Doppler imaging. HHU examination is becoming part of bedside diagnostic methods and in near future it will probably become an important part of medical education. Incorporation of HHU as an adjunct to the physical examination rouse speculation that auscultation will become less important.

So report by *Mehta et al* confirmed the value of HHU in accuracy improvement of bedside cardiac diagnosis¹. They assume however that increase experience with HHU will decrease the use of stethoscope. In their response article Steinhubl and Topol, among others, advocate stethoscope retirement in favor of HHU². From practitioner view heart auscultation before any echo examination, either HHU or standard, further improves diagnostic accuracy. It provides better clinical perception, directs examination, and help us not to miss certain pathology. Good example is characteristic ASD auscultatory finding (pulmonic midsystolic ejection murmur and fixed splitting of the second heart sound) which warns on defect presence and in case of normal echo finding obligate us to proceed with transesophageal echocardiography (TEE). Another example is artificial valve malfunction where changes in the normal sounds produced by prosthetic valve help us to recognize the problem and regardless of HHO finding standard and TEE examination are indicated in each patient.

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LITERATURE

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