

*Letter to the Editor*

Dear Sir,

We read with interest the recent paper of Dr. Terho et al. (1).

The difference in reactions to negative control according to its distance from histamine is intuitively very appealing. However, we are concerned that the skin pricking, weal marking and weal measuring were apparently not done blind. (We presume a fresh lancet was used for each prick test.) Without blinding we cannot be sure that no biases were introduced into the study. Unconscious variations of fractions of a millimeter could completely change the results. In our experience weal borders are not very clear, and marked outlines transferred to case report forms are always slightly blurred. The line width of an outline is at best 0.5 mm, and can be 1 mm or more. Regardless of blinding,

the variation in measurement is of the same order as the measurement, e.g. a 2 mm diameter weal could be recorded as 1 mm or 3 mm diameter.

In summary, we are concerned that the study design was not sufficiently rigorous to support the conclusions, however appealing they are, and we do not think that the results justify a change in current skin testing methodology.

*H. K. Watson*

*R. I. Harris*

REFERENCES

1. Terho, E. O., Husman, K., Kivekäs, J. & Riihimäki, H.: Histamine control affects the weal produced by the adjacent diluent control in skin prick tests. *Allergy* 44, 30-32, 1989.

Dear Sir,

We would like to thank Mr. Harris and Mr. Watson for their interest in our paper and the criticism presented in their letter. The description of the prick test method in our paper was not detailed enough, so that some explanatory notes seem to be required. The order of test solutions in the test panel was not randomised (as mentioned in the discussion), but the contents of the test solutions were not known to the nurse who made the tests. Thus, both skin pricking and weal marking and measuring were done "blind". Fresh lancets were used, of course, for each prick. A fine-point ink drawing

pen was used for drawing the weal outlines. The technique for drawing was the same throughout the study. There is no reason to assume that the possible inaccuracies in the measuring due to reasons presented in the letter would have occurred systematically in favour of the other test site. In conclusion, we consider that this source of bias is excluded.

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