Ambulatory Devices Measuring Cardiorespiratory Activity with Motion

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Abstract: Holter-type devices with sets of sensors, enabling long-term measurement of quantitative respiratory parameters, were designed and constructed. Pneumonitor 2 was intended for physiologic and athletic applications, and Pneumonitor 3 for sleep studies. Both allow simultaneous, comfortable, ambulatory monitoring of cardiorespiratory activity, such as ECG, impedance pneumography (IP), and motion; the second device also allows pulse oximetry and uses improved setting with combined receiving ECG and IP electrodes. Preliminary results showed that our prototypes provide signals reliable to monitor heart and breathing activity quantitatively. We tested the devices in different conditions, including walking, stair-climbing, cycle ergometer training, natural daily activity, and sleep. They can quantitatively measure respiratory flows, volumes, and minute ventilation using IP after calibration. They are also able to estimate tachogram from ECG. They allow the detection of subject activity and body position via accelerometer and gyroscope, which is helpful during IP calibration and interpretation. Pneumonitor 3 also enables measurement of blood saturation with a pulse wave (pulse oximetry).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Traditional respiratory monitoring

Respiratory monitoring is mainly based on airflow measurement using spirometry and longer recording of flows and volumes with pneumotachometry (PNT), allow one to assess obstruction, restriction, and other issues in patients with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Miller et al., 2005). These methods measure flow values directly and are the most accurate. However, they are hard to use in ambulatory conditions and cannot be performed in an outpatient setting. In clinical practice, respiratory parameters are considered only for conditions which allow connection to a tube, not for natural daily and nightly functioning or athletics outside a gym.

The ability to record respiratory effort and quantitative flow- and volume-related parameters (as well as inspiratory and expiratory phases, and respiratory rate) in new settings could be of real benefit and impact both for physiologists and for sport medicine experts.

1.2 Ambulatory respiratory monitoring

Traditional examination captures a single point in time. From a clinical point of view, additional testing carried out under more natural conditions and taking into account activity, circadian rhythms, etc., could expand early diagnosis.

Another factor is sleep; respiratory activity is known to weaken during the night (McNicholas, 1997). Basic analysis commonly performed during polysomnography consists of detection of snoring and central or obstructive sleep apnea, e.g., in connection with blood saturation and heart activity (Hoyer et al., 2001; Roebuck et al., 2013). The breathing patterns are usually measured indirectly by a belt and a cannula, which make sleep less natural and comfortable.

There are some methods, which could be considered as an alternative to PNT, impedance pneumography, respiratory plethysmography, or acoustical approach. Based on the context of continuous studies, breathing could be precisely described by simple parameters: minute ventilation, tidal volume, and respiratory rate. All of these could be determined with impedance pneumography (IP), which seems to be the most accurate in terms of shape of the volume-
related signals. It is known that this method can be used to measure ventilation in ambulatory settings (Seppa et al., 2010; Mlynczak et al., 2015). IP could be performed during sleep along with Holter ECG monitoring.

1.3 Motion and heart activity

It has been noted that the calibration coefficients converting impedance to volume are dependent mainly upon subjects and body positions (breathing depth and rate were of less impact) (Mlynczak et al., 2015). Therefore, the reliable calibration procedure should concern measurements performed in various body positions, and it would be worthwhile to track the current position during IP measurements to apply specific calibration coefficient.

Motion tracking seems also very important with regards to sleep studies, e.g., for hypnogram estimation. The motion-associated artifacts in IP signal could be adaptively removed, smoothed, or marked using a motion signal synchronized with the respiratory one, without any cooperation from the subject.

Based on the present guidelines, each sleep study device should be equipped with pulse oximetry and heart activity registration unit (Collop et al., 2007). Furthermore, the simultaneous analysis of heart activity along with respiratory one could allow assessment of the autonomic nervous system operation (e.g., autonomic heart regulation investigated from heart rate variability). Such experiments are rarely carried out under natural conditions. Grossman et al. (Grossman and Taylor, 2007) suggested that the depth and the frequency of breathing affect heart activity in different way and presented different physiological mechanisms of control between heart rate and heart rate variability.

1.4 Objective

The aim of the study was to prepare portable devices which would register respiratory activity (using impedance pneumography) together with ECG, motion, and/or pulse oximetry (saturation, pulse wave) for physiologic and sport applications, and sleep studies.

2 METHODS

2.1 The devices

Pneumonitor 2 was made as a modification of the first version (Mlynczak et al., 2014), extending the device sensors (IP, ECG, and motion) and power management. It is presented in Fig. 1.

Pneumonitor 2 is 14.2cm x 6.9cm x 2.3cm and has a weight of 160g. It is based on the tetrapolar impedance measurement method with a sinusoidal application current with an amplitude adjustable up to 1mA, and 100kHz frequency.

We improved power management by replacing the elements that consumed the most energy, and by using a rechargeable battery, similar to those found in mobile phones, with 900mAh capacity. This allowed measurement for at least 12h and SD card recording, with a 250Hz sampling frequency. The sampling frequency is chosen as a compromise between the output data size, the possible jitter in the estimation of the R-wave fiducial point, and the accuracy sufficient from sleep studies perspective (Task Force, 1996).

ECG amplifier has the gain of 100V/V, the bandwidth up to 100Hz, 10mV/sqrt(Hz) noise and 10bit resolution. InvenSense’s MPU-6050 (accelerometer and gyroscope unit, available commercially) was employed to estimate motion.

Wireless communication was omitted since no clinical necessity for online analysis of results was noted. A very small OLED screen was added to show signal waveforms. A simple, native PC application capable of exploratory data analysis and recording of samples in a database was also prepared.

Pneumonitor 3 had the same IP, ECG, and motion components. It differed due to the addition of a wireless pulse oximetry module (Contec CMS50EW, commercially available), connected to the main device via Bluetooth communication. It had a custom-made housing, which was more solid due to the expected operating conditions (e.g., regarding the possibility to connect the device to A/D converter via BNC connectors). It uses improved setting of electrodes described in the Configuration section. Pneumonitor 3 prototype is 16.7cm x 10.1cm x 3.5cm with a weight of 330g. It is presented in Fig. 2.
2.2 Configuration

Pneumonitor 2 has 7 leads, intended to be attached using standard spot, disposable ECG electrodes: 4 for IP and 3 for single-lead ECG. Pneumonitor 3 has 5 leads, 2 receiving ECG electrode were combined with IP inputs - both signals could be easily separated based on different frequency spectra.

The devices provide two preset levels of internal amplification in the impedance receiving chain, in order to adjust the measuring range depending on the electrode configuration.

Pneumonitor 2 and Pneumonitor 3 are intended to be used with one of two electrode configurations. First, the one proposed by Seppa et al. likely provides the best linearity between impedance and volume changes; in this configuration, the receiving electrodes were placed on the midaxillary line at about 5th- and 6th-rib level and the application electrodes were mounted on the proximal side of the arm at the level of the receiving ones (Seppa et al., 2013). The second configuration is a "classical" one, where both application and receiving electrodes are positioned at about 5th- and 6th-rib level. It is considered worse in terms of transition linearity, yet most likely optimal in terms of motion artifacts.

The voltage-to-impedance transition function was established for two settings of internal input amplification. We confirmed that the function is linearly dependent on the amplification setting.

ECG could be registered by Pneumonitor 2 using various electrode configurations. For basic measurements, we used differential electrodes placed below the right clavicle on the chest and below the left 12th rib. A reference electrode was then placed below the right 12th rib, roughly symmetric to the second electrode across the sagittal plane.

2.3 Cardiac component in impedance signal

We observed that electrical heart activity is a component of the raw signal registered using impedance pneumography. Despite having the option to extract the ECG-like signal (cardiac IP component), we did not remove the one-lead ECG unit, because:

- the ratio of amplitudes of cardiac and respiratory IP components in raw impedance signals changes during breathing and differs depending on the subject,
- the cardiac IP component is smoothed compared to the real ECG signal, particularly during the QRS complex,
- the cardiac IP component is registered with a specific electrode configuration optimized for respiratory, not cardiac recordings, and
- the one-lead ECG signal could be recorded for various configurations and synchronized with the distorted IP signal, allowing its adaptive filtration.

2.4 Evaluation

The described devices are intended to be used in extensive study taking into account physiology-, sport- and sleep-related protocols. To validate the reliability of the respiratory- and ECG-related parts of
the devices we performed the calibration procedure
(free 30-second-lasting breathing in supine, sitting
and standing), and the test procedure consisting of
6 normal breaths and then 6 deep breaths (with the
subjective difference), for three breathing rates (6, 10
and 15 BPM) and for the same three body positions
as during calibration (Mlynczak et al., 2014).

Based on the reference PNT (from Pneumotachometer M909, by Medikro Oy, Finland, and Simpson’s quadrature for integration of flow values into
volumes), we fitted the best linear model without intercept (after mean value removal) between PNT and respiratory IP component (after subtraction of the
smoothed (respiratory-related) signal from the raw
one). The calibration coefficient was used to convert
the impedance signal into volumes. We evaluated the
accuracy of tidal volume estimation by analysis of the
difference between maximum and minimum value of
volume for each breathing cycle, between reference
PNT signal and respiratory IP component after ap-
plying the calibration coefficient.

We also estimated and compared heart rates from
ECG and cardiac IP component signals using adaptive
amplitude thresholding method (after drift re-
moval). The RR intervals were calculated as a
difference between two consecutive R points, and
tachogram were transformed to beats per minute
(BPM) and interpolated to 250Hz in order to have the
same number of samples as original IP or ECG.

The preliminary pilot testing was carried out on a
group of 10 participants (all males). MATLAB soft-
ware was used to review and analyze the results.

In order to evaluate qualitatively the acquired sig-
als and the usability from subjects’ perspective, we
also asked to carry out testing during more “natural”
conditions: walking, climbing stairs, exercising on a
cycle ergometer for 90 seconds with the increasing
load (from 50W to 200W). The activity and changing
positions on a bed were tested during sleep.

3 RESULTS

Simultaneous ECG, IP, and PNT recordings during
the static test and cycle-ergometer exercise showed
that the quality of the signals allows one to calculate
the tachogram, respiratory rate, and tidal volume.

The mean overall accuracy of tidal volume estima-
tion for the static test was 86.5%. Heart rate estima-
tion based on cardiac IP component, for supine body
position, reached mean 97.3% agreement in compari-
son with ECG.

No artifacts that might preclude analysis (with-
out the one at the beginning of some motions) were
shown during pilot evaluation in natural situations,
e.g., changing positions on a bed or walking.

Fig. 4 provides sample raw IP signal measured
while exercising on a cycle ergometer (with pneumo-
tachometry flow and volume signal). Sample record-
ings of IP and ECG with breathing phases and HRV
analysis were presented in Fig. 5. Finally, Fig.
6 presents sample smoothed blood saturation data,
along with pulse wave, the IP signal distorted with
motion artifact, the 3-axis accelerometry signal and
ECG, registered during sleep.

4 DISCUSSION

The first ambulatory system was described by Vuorela
et al. (Vuorela et al., 2010). In contrary to their con-
struction, we decided to remove most of the analog
blocks for signal conditioning and processing and ex-
pand the analysis performed simultaneously after sig-
nal acquisition. The key novelties are adding the abil-
ity to measure blood saturation and pulse wave, and
reducing the number of electrodes in Pneumonitor 3,
from 7 to 5, which could be particularly useful for
subjects’ comforts during sleep studies.

Our prototypes will allow further research to con-
firm whether the use of IP as a clinically relevant
method is possible in ambulatory conditions (in par-
ticular, whether it is feasible to measure quantitative
parameters, particularly tidal volume and minute ven-
tilation, as well as breathing phase timing, under “dy-
namic” conditions).

In our previous work, we confirmed that a cali-
bration procedure is needed (particularly for various
body positions) to measure quantitative parameters
with accuracy comparable to the reference. However,
Figure 5: Sample ECG and IP signals and correspondingly calculated respiration phases and tachogram; recorded using Pneumonitor 2.

Figure 6: Sample ECG, smoothed impedance pneumography, pulse wave, smoothed blood saturation and accelerometry signals; with motion artifacts connected to the body position changes around 142 and 143 minutes of measurement; recorded during sleep using Pneumonitor 3.
we provided those results and consideration for static, "clear" conditions. They were free of possibly distorting maneuvers, such as irregular, shallow, intermittent breathing; quick movements; changes in electrode attachment (pressure of contact with the skin); or non-breathing-associated changes in the volume of the thorax, etc. These could influence the calibration coefficient in a way that would only allow one to state qualitative information about the depth of breathing.

One-lead ECG appears to provide results that do not allow clinical investigation and diagnosis, but do allow screening-like conclusions with greater comfort. Occurrences of the cardiac IP component may lead to the concept of removing the classic ECG measurement, however it seems, that cardiac IP component is not fully visible in each participant. In our opinion, if we are able to use the same electrodes to measure impedance and ECG signal, it will be worth having the redundant measurements for verification purposes.

Removing separated ECG input for combined one is prepared in order to improve the usability of Pneumonitor 3. It is also related with motion tracking. We decided to limit ourselves to a single inertial unit (including both accelerometer and gyroscope sensors) to maintain comfort and accuracy of detecting basic body positions and activity levels (Bouten et al., 1997; Ermes et al., 2008).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Prototypes of two devices intended for cardiorespiratory measurements in ambulatory conditions (with motion tracking, including activity and body position changes) were prepared and preliminarily evaluated.

The devices utilize impedance pneumography to calculate respiratory parameters (tidal volume, minute ventilation and respiratory rate) after calibration, ECG to record heart activity, and a combination of 3-axis accelerometer and gyroscope to track motion. Pneumonitor 3 also includes pulse oximetry providing saturation and pulse wave, and uses 5 electrodes setting with 2 ECG electrodes combined with receiving IP ones.

Pneumonitor 2 is designed for the environment physiology analyses (registering ventilation and cardiac functioning in subjects with obesity or nervous-muscle-related illnesses) and sports medicine (for ambulatory diagnostics, monitoring training, and determining exercise capacity). Pneumonitor 3 is intended mainly for sleep studies to monitor breathing disorders and the treatment progress.

REFERENCES


