

Letter to the editor

How to make the invisible anterior tympanomeatal angle visible

Dear sir,

Peltola and Saarento (1992) in their Short Communication propose a 'new method' to visualize foreign bodies hidden in the anterior tympanomeatal angle by administering water in the ear canal of the patient (who should lie on his back with his head tilted). While I agree that this trick does work I came up with a different explanation of why the water might assist in visualizing this commonly invisible area (Wind, 1984). I assumed – and still assume – that the water surface adopts a convex position rather than a concave one as Peltola and Saarento think. Also I mentioned that the oblique position of the surface relative to the optical axis of the microscope adds to the desired effect by obtaining refraction (cf. the oblique-stick-in-the-water effect). While it might be worthwhile to conduct some experiments to assess the (positive or negative) rela-

tive contributions of both mechanisms to the effect concerned, I do not believe that simply washing out the ear wax, as suggested by the authors, suffices to remove all the wax from the ear canal skin and so obtain the water surface adopting a concave shape.

Yours faithfully,
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References

- Peltola, T. M., Saarento, R. (1992) Water used to visualize and remove hidden foreign bodies from the external ear canal. *The Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, **106**: 157–158.
Wind, J. (1984) Making the invisible anterior tympanomeatal angle visible. *Laryngoscope*, **94**: 413.