To the editor:

Hip fractures have a high incidence, mainly in the elderly. Poorly controlled pain can induce anxiety, fear and delirium, which is associated with poor functional recovery and increased morbidity and mortality.¹
Nerve blocks are an underused technique in the ED, but may be an effective alternative for pain control in hip fracture patients. In 2016, Riddell et al. published a systematic review concluding that performing an eco-guided FNB in the ED decreased pain intensity, reduced the amount of systemic analgesia required, and was associated with fewer adverse events in patients older than 65 years with hip fractures. In 2017, the American College of Emergency Physicians published ultrasound clinical guidelines, which contemplate performing peripheral nerve blocks in the ED as a safe and beneficial technique for the patient. Ultrasound guidance of nerve blocks is associated with a lower incidence of complications such as accidental intravascular injection or nerve injury, faster pain relief, and requires a smaller amount of local anesthetic. Moreover, eco-guided FNB is an effective, safe, easy-to-learn procedure for the EP and is well accepted by patients.

Complications of eco-guided FNB are infrequent. Some disadvantages of the technique are inconsistent analgesia, since not all the sensory nerves innervating the joint are affected, and the appearance of motor block at the quadriceps level. Furthermore, the analgesic effect has a limited duration, depending on the dose and drug administered, so that patients with long waiting times until surgery may experience pain again.

Treatment with anticoagulant drugs does not contraindicate the procedure, the risk-benefit of which should be assessed on an individual basis. There is little evidence of eco-guided FNB in patients with dementia, as they were excluded in many of the studies. The use of ultrasound increases the safety and efficacy of procedures routinely performed in the emergency department. It is necessary to establish formal training to enable professionals to acquire the necessary skills to carry out these procedures. Among them, eco-guided FNB for pain control in selected hip fracture patients.

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Figure 1. Ultrasound image at the left inguinal level.

CFV: common femoral vein. CFA: common femoral artery. FN: femoral nerve. Turquoise arrows: linear echogenic image corresponding to the needle infusing the local anesthetic (LA), which surrounds the femoral nerve.

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