ABSTRACT

KNOWLEDGE AND FEARS
OF ANAESTHESIA AND SURGERY
IN JAMAICAN PATIENTS
INCLUDING A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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This is a multi-faceted study which examines
a) knowledge of anaesthesia and the role of the
anaesthetist, b) modes of acquisition and dissemina-
tion of medical oriented information, and c) the
incidence and nature of preoperative fear in Jamaican
patients awaiting surgery. Three hundred patients
were interviewed on the evening before their operation
and a questionnaire completed for each patient. The
presence or absence of preoperative anxiety was deter-
mined by direct questioning. The results indicate
that patients had very little accurate knowledge of
the role the anaesthetist would play in their care.

Patients had a fairly well developed concept of
general anaesthesia but exhibited a low level of
knowledge and receptivity for regional anaesthesia.
Many different modes of information were utilized and
recommended by patients but audiovisual techniques,
especially television, appeared to be most popular. The incidence of preoperative anxiety was found to be approximately one out of every four patients. The nature of these fears was similar to those observed in other studies. Improvement in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the contact time between patient and anaesthetist is recommended as a possible solution to these problems. Patient education, the dispelling of myths and misconceptions, and the opportunity for expression and discussion of fear may all be necessary to allay preoperative anxieties. It may be that in the execution of this responsibility, the professionalism of the anaesthetist will become more recognised and appreciated.