

ABSTRACT

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

Clarence D McGaw

This is a multi-faceted study which examines a) knowledge of anaesthesia and the role of the anaesthetist, b) modes of acquisition and dissemination 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 determined by direct questioning. The results indicate that patients had very little accurate knowledge of the rôle 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.