

THE HANDOVER OF RESPONSIBILITY DURING AN ANAESTHETIC

During an anaesthetic, the major responsibility of the anaesthetist is to provide care for the patient. This requires the continuous presence of the anaesthetist. In certain circumstances, it is necessary for the anaesthetist to hand over that responsibility to a colleague. Specific procedures must be followed. Handovers will not compromise patient safety provided that these procedures are followed. In prolonged anaesthetics, handover may be advantageous to the patient by preventing undue fatigue of the anaesthetist.

1. Temporary relief of the anaesthetist

This is necessary when the primary anaesthetist must leave the patient but will return to resume management of the anaesthetic.

- 1.1 The primary anaesthetist will leave only while the patient is in a stable state and no potentially adverse events are likely to occur.
- 1.2 The primary anaesthetist must be satisfied as to the competence of the relieving anaesthetist to provide care and must have explained all facts relevant to safe management.
- 1.3 The primary anaesthetist must be available to return at short notice.

2. Permanent handover of responsibility for care

This is necessary when the primary anaesthetist must leave the patient under the care of another anaesthetist for the remainder of the anaesthetic.

- 2.1 The primary anaesthetist will only hand over responsibility at a time when the clinical status of the patient is appropriate.
- 2.2 The primary anaesthetist must be satisfied as to the competency of the relieving anaesthetist to assume management of the case. The handover procedure must include a briefing as to the patient's pre-operative status, events during the anaesthetic and discussion of any foreseeable problems.
- 2.3 The relieving anaesthetist has responsibility to be fully conversant with the patient's present and ongoing anaesthetic management and must indicate a willingness to accept that responsibility.

3. Protocol for transfer of responsibility

The following items must also be considered by the primary and the relieving anaesthetist :

- 3.1 The patient's health status having regard to past history and the present condition.
- 3.2 Observations of the patient according to College Policy Document P18 - *Monitoring During Anaesthesia* as shown by the anaesthetic record.
- 3.3 A check to ensure correct functioning of the anaesthesia machine and any other equipment which is interfaced to the patient as well as of all monitoring devices in use.

GUIDELINES ON HANDOVER OF RESPONSIBILITY DURING AN ANAESTHETIC

- 3.4 The provision of information about the handover to the surgeon and (in the case of a trainee) the consultant anaesthetist.

- 3.5 The time of handover should be documented in the anaesthetic record.

This policy document has been prepared having regard to general circumstances, and it is the responsibility of the practitioner to have express regard to the particular circumstances of each case, and the application of this policy document in each case.

Policy documents are reviewed from time to time, and it is the responsibility of the practitioner to ensure that the practitioner has obtained the current version. Policy documents have been prepared having regard to the information available at the time of their preparation, and the practitioner should therefore have regard to any information, research or material which may have been published or become available subsequently.

Whilst the College endeavours to ensure that policy documents are as current as possible at the time of their preparation, it takes no responsibility for matters arising from changed circumstances or information or material which may have become available subsequently.”