American Society of Anesthesiologists

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The Facts: Research supports improved patient outcomes with Anesthesiologist supervision of nurses

Silber (2000) *Anesthesiology Journal*
Compares mortality and complication rates in cases with medical direction by a physician anesthesiologist, versus cases without anesthesiologist direction. Analyzes more than 200,000 Medicare cases involving general or orthopedic surgeries at Pennsylvania hospitals between 1991 and 1994.

Results:

- 2.5 more deaths per 1,000 cases when an anesthesiologist was not involved
- 6.9 more deaths per 1,000 cases with complications when an anesthesiologist was not involved
- When extrapolated to the estimated 20 million Medicare surgical procedures of all types performed annually, the study results suggest hundreds of excess deaths per year when anesthesiologists are not involved.

Pine (2003) *American Association of Nurse Anesthetists Journal*
Studies the effect of type of anesthesia provider on mortality rates of Medicare patients undergoing 8 different surgical procedures. This study only examines mortality rates of patients undergoing anesthesia and omits an analysis of adverse outcomes of anesthesia care, including serious complications, such as blindness, infection, seizure/stroke or brain damage.

Results:

- 38 deaths per 10,000 cases in hospitals where all anesthetics were administered by an anesthesiologist or an anesthesiologist/nurse anesthetist care team; 45 deaths per 10,000 cases when anesthesia was administered by nurse anesthetists who were supervised by non-anesthesiologist physicians.
- Bottom line: seven more patients died for every 10,000 cases without an anesthesiologist.

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CONCLUSION: Among Medicare patients—America's most vulnerable patient population—surgeries are safer when an anesthesiologist provides or directs anesthesia care, rather than when a nurse anesthetist works under the supervision of a non-anesthesiologist physician.

The American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) is a 44,000 member educational and professional organization representing medically trained anesthesiologists. As physicians, anesthesiologists have the most advanced education and training of any anesthesia professional and are responsible for the safe delivery of over 90% of all anesthetics provided in the United States. Outside of the operating room, anesthesiologists are often found treating patients in pain clinics and delivering critical medical care to patients in hospital intensive care units, emergency rooms and diagnostic facilities.