

## Propofol, Your Money and Your Safety

Dear Editor:

The WSJ's article "Making Colonoscopies More Comfortable" (page D1, December 27, 2005) is a balanced look at propofol, an anesthetic offering a deeper level of patient sedation. However, since the article refers to anesthesiologists not wanting to be "cut out" of the delivery of propofol, some clarification is necessary about why we should indeed be involved.

During a colonoscopy, the screening for colon cancer, some patients experience discomfort and pain, discouraging others from getting a possible life-saving procedure. However, when propofol is used, the procedure can be pain-free.

But with propofol comes risks; blood pressure drops, loss of airway reflexes, breathing problems. Anesthesiologists are trained to minimize these risks. And, quoting the unbiased Food and Drug Administration, propofol "...should be administered only by persons trained in the administration of general anesthesia".

Not fingering any one medical specialty, there is evidence that propofol, when administered by non-anesthesiologists, can be deadly. In Florida, there are five such reported deaths.

Still, in some states gastroenterologists administer propofol themselves with the blessing of insurance companies. As your article mentioned, guidelines by gastroenterologist organizations claim anesthesiologists are not "medically necessary." These guidelines are biased because gastroenterologists can save money without the anesthesiologist present. Propofol is quicker, allowing for more patients.

Would you prefer deeper sedation by a trained medical specialist, or by someone who might save you money while making more themselves, and is not fully trained?

Colonoscopy is a tiny percentage of our practice. Our sole motivation is patient safety.

A patient's sedation should never be a monetary issue. It's about your right to choose the safest, most humane procedure. Just as gastroenterologists are specialists, and if they and insurance companies wish to minimize risk, they should encourage, not discourage, the use of the most advanced drugs delivered by the most qualified specialists.

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