

## Anaesthesia A Very Short Introduction

By Aidan O'Donnell

- Has anyone in the group undergone any form of anaesthesia? How was it? Did you feel safe? How did you get on with the anaesthetist? How did you feel afterwards?
- Before you read this book, what were your images of anaesthetists and what they do?
- Medical dramas are a popular form of entertainment. How are anaesthetists represented? Is this representation positive or negative?
- Under what circumstances is it ethical to inflict pain on another human being?
- How would you define "unconsciousness"? Are you unconscious when you sleep? Are you conscious when you dream vividly?
- Do all animals feel pain?
- When you have a headache, do you take analgesia or prefer to wait until it goes away? Why do you feel this way?
- If you were to undergo anaesthesia for a major operation, what level of training would you want your anaesthetist to have? Would it have to be a doctor? Would a nurse with appropriate training be OK? Would a technician (neither a doctor nor a nurse) with appropriate training be OK? Would a technician with only basic medical skills be OK? Would you be prepared to pay extra to have a doctor deliver your anaesthetic?
- As part of the anaesthetic consent process, some risks are usually discussed. Some people want to know every risk, no matter how small, yet before you fly the pilot does not mention the possibility that an engine will catch fire in mid air, even though this sometimes happens and is extremely serious. How should doctors present risk to patients?
- Which do you fear more, the anaesthetic or the surgery? Why? What informs these fears?
- Was it OK for Arthur Guedel to repeatedly submerge his dog in water to demonstrate endotracheal intubation?
- Xenon has some of the features of an ideal anaesthetic. Should we pursue xenon more avidly, to try perhaps to have it brought into daily use?
- If judicial execution by lethal injection must be performed, is it acceptable to use drugs normally reserved for anaesthesia? What alternatives exist?
- Is pain necessary? What would happen if you couldn't feel pain of any type?
- What value, if any, does pain in childbirth have?
- Who should be admitted to Intensive Care, and who should be turned away?
- There are two hypothetical anaesthetic techniques. Technique A is associated with complete survival but carries a 1% risk of full awareness with pain. Technique B is associated with complete absence of awareness but carries a 1% risk of death. You are free to choose which one, but your operation is essential. Which will you choose?

Other books by Aidan O'Donnell

A. O'Donnell (assistant editor) *Oxford Handbook of Anaesthesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011)

Further reading

Aidan O'Donnell's website [www.aidanodonnell.info](http://www.aidanodonnell.info).