

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF ANESTHESIOLOGIST'S ROLE IN TURKEY

Original Article

TÜRK TOPLUMUNUN ANESTEZİSTİN ROLÜ HAKKINDAKİ BİLGİLERİ

Ferdi Menda

Yeditepe University Hospital , Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation.

Ozge Koner

Yeditepe University Hospital , Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation.

Vildan Ersoz

Yeditepe University Hospital , Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation.

Pınar Ilmer

Yeditepe University Hospital , Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation.

Bora Aykac

Yeditepe University Hospital , Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation.

Corresponding Author

Ferdi Menda

*Yeditepe University Hospital Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation
Kozyatagi / Istanbul / Turkey
e-mail: fmenda@yeditepe.edu.tr*

SUMMARY

This prospective study was designed to assess patient's understanding and knowledge of the anesthesiologist's role and responsibilities in the operating room and in other areas in a university hospital in Turkey. 251 adult patients were asked to fill a questionnaire in the preanesthetic clinic of Yeditepe University Hospital. Results of the questionnaire revealed that 13,1% of the respondents did not know who an anesthesiologist was and 69,7% knew that the anesthesiologist was a doctor. Of the respondents 6% considered the anesthesiologists as more important than the surgeon, 56% felt that the anesthesiologists were easy to talk to and only 23% stated that the anesthesiologists explained the possible complications and 58% thought that the anesthesiologists took care of them postoperatively. Of all the respondents, 36% were aware of the anesthesiologists role in the intensive care unit. The present study pointed out poor knowledge of the public regarding the role of anesthesiologist.

Keywords: anaesthesiologist; public; function.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki bir üniversite hastanesine başvuran hastaların anesteziyoloğun rolü , ameliyathane içi ve dışındaki sorumlulukları hakkındaki bilgilerini değerlendirmek için planlandı. Bu amaçla Yeditepe Üniversitesi Hastanesi anestezi öncesi kiliniğine başvuran 251 hastadan bir anket formu doldurmaları istendi. Hastaların %13'ü anesteziyoloğun kim olduğunu hiç bilmezken % 69,7'si anesteziyoloğun doktor olduğunu bildi. Hastaların % 6'sı anesteziyoloğun cerrahattan daha önemli olduğunu düşündüğünü, % 56'sı anesteziyoloğun kolay iletişim kurulabilecek bir kişi olarak gördüğünü söyledi. Önceden ameliyat olmuş hastaların yalnızca % 23'ü anesteziyoloğun kendilerine muhtemel komplikasyonları anlattığını ve % 58'i de

anesteziyoloğun kendisiyle ameliyat sonrası dönemde yeterince ilgilendiğini düşündüğünü beyan etti. Tüm hastaların % 36'sı anesteziyoloğun yoğun bakım ünitesindeki rolü hakkında bilgi sahibiydi. Yaptığımız bu çalışma toplumun anesteziyoloğun rolü hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadığını gösterdi.

Anahtar kelimeler: Anesteziyolog; toplum, fonksiyon.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread role of anesthesiologists in short-term care, as well as in pain relief, is not known to the public and they have limited knowledge about the specialty (1,2). Even other healthcare personel and academic clinical staff do not know the role of anesthesiologist in or outside the operating room in the hospital (3). Surveys have been conducted throughout the world to assess the public perception of the anesthesiologists and there has been a little change in the knowledge among the public regarding the specialty since the 1970s (4). Hame et al suggested that its reason may be that anesthesiologists has less contact with a conscious patient than other medical professionals (5). This study was planned to assess the public perception of anesthesiologists in Turkey.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

After Ethics Committee approval of Yeditepe University a questionnaire was given to 251 adult patients (>18 years of age) before preanesthetic visit. The initial part of the questionnaire consisted of questions about demographic data such as age, gender and educational level of the respondent. Participants were queried as to how many surgeries they had, whether they had met an anesthesiologist previously and if they had met one, how was the anesthesiologist's attitude and explanation. Questions pertaining to the job description of an anesthesiologist and the various roles in the hospital were also asked. Respondents were asked to choose

one of the following responses: "yes", "no", "do not know" or "do not recall".

Descriptive analyses were done for all the demographic variables. Fisher's exact test was used to compare the responses between groups of respondents.

RESULTS

Of the participants 56 % were male and 44 % female. Distribution of the patients according to the age groups are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution of the patients according to the age groups.

Age (years)	18-30	31-50	51-70	>70
Percentage of the respondents (%)	31	40	23	6

The education level of the respondents is shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Educational level of respondents.

Educational level	Overall percentage (%)
None	7,9
Primary school	9,9
Secondary school	9,1
High school	36,6
University level	36,5

When asked about the job description of an anesthesiologist, 13,1% answered that they did not know what an anesthesiologist was, 69,7% knew that the anesthesiologist is a qualified doctor, 10,3% described the anesthesiologist as a technician, 0,7% as a physiotherapist, 0,3% as a nurse, 0,3% as an intern and 5,6% as "other".

Education level of 75% of the respondents, who knew that the anesthesiologist is a doctor, was either high school or university. Compared to non-and low educated people, respondents who attended to high school and university knew that the anesthesiologist was a doctor with a significantly higher percentage (Fisher's exact test $p < 0,0001$).

Of the participants 62% had at least one surgery in the past. Of the respondents having surgery in the past 69% knew that the anesthesiologist was a doctor. The rate of "knowing" that the anesthesiologist is a "doctor" were statistically similar between the patients having a surgery experience and no surgery in the past. (Fisher's exact test $p > 0,01$).

Of the patients 35% had one surgery in the past, 17% had two surgeries in the past, 10% had three or more surgeries and 38% of respondents answered that they had not had a surgery before. Of the participants who had surgery in the past, 16% recalled their anesthesiologists name whereas 62% knew their surgeons name. Participants that have encountered an anesthesiologist in the past were required to respond to questions about the attitude of the anesthesiologist. Of the participants 48% stated that the anesthesiologist explained the patient how he/she would put him/her to sleep or numb the area. 19% of respondents stated that they were informed about the anesthesia options. The responses are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Attitude of Anesthesiologists .

Question	Yes(%)	No(%)	Do not recall(%)
Did your anesthesiologist explain how he/she would put you to sleep or numb the area?	48	33	19
Did your anesthesiologist ask your options for being put to sleep?	19	45	36
Did your anesthesiologist explain the possible complications?	23	40	37
Did your anesthesiologist explain the possible side effects of drugs used?	17	71	12
Did your anesthesiologist answer your questions to your satisfaction?	39	10	51*
Do you think that your anesthesiologist took care of you postoperatively?	58	11	31
Did your anesthesiologist explain his/her role to you?	50	13	37
Do you think that the anesthesiologist was easy to talk to?	56	31	13

- The response option was "no questions asked".

When asked whom they consider more important, a surgeon or an anesthesiologist, 6% answered that they considered the anesthesiologist to be more important, 14% said surgeon were more important and 80% felt that both were equally important.

The responses of participants to questions to the various functions and responsibilities of an anesthesiologist in the hospital are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Function of an anesthesiologist.

Function of anesthesiologist	Yes(%)	No(%)	Do not know(%)
Determines fitness for surgery	66	21	13
Obtains written consent	36	23	61
Monitors vital signs during surgery	59	8	33
Transfuses blood when needed	21	43	36
Has a role in the ICU	34	32	36
Resuscitates patients	23	52	25
Ensures that patient wakes up without any problem	76	10	14
Ensures that patient is pain-free	67	16	17

DISCUSSION

Our study showed impressive results about the patient perception of the role of anesthesiologists, the awareness of public about the preoperative functions as well as role of the anesthesiologists outside the operating room. In the present study 69,7% of respondents knew that the anesthesiologist was a doctor compared with 67% in a survey done in UK (6). Various studies showed this rate to be 50% to 87,7% (5,7,8,9,10,11).

The participants having a surgery in the past recall their surgeon's name more frequently than their anesthesiologist's name. This is a sign which shows that the

anesthesiologists are the specialists "behind the scene".

Although 59% of patients knew that monitoring the vital signs during surgery is the anesthesiologists function, the answers to the questions regarding the other functions of anesthesiologist in the perioperative period were not convincing.

Although only 69% of respondents knew that the anesthesiologist is a doctor, it is interesting to note that 6% of patients thought that anesthesiologists were more important than surgeons. Our study showed similar results with a previous study giving a rate of 5% (2).

The results to questions about the preoperative visit revealed that patients were not well informed about anesthesia preoperatively. Routine perioperative visits have been proven to be of immense benefit in many aspects (12). Matthey et al stated that the preoperative visit offers the opportunity to allay the fears and misconceptions of the patient (13,14). Furthermore, it is of great benefit in alleviating patients' postoperative pain (9).

42% of participants believed that anesthesiologists work under the direction of a surgeon whereas in an earlier study in the UK this ratio was 57% (15).

Only 58% of the patients having a surgery in the past thought that the anesthesiologist took care of the patient in his/her room postoperatively. This shows that anesthesiologists have to take more part in the postoperative treatment and follow-up.

Only 36% of respondents knew that anesthesiologists have to obtain an informed consent. Since this can cause a serious legal problem, anesthesiologists must be more sensitive about the issue. Although the majority of the doctors working in the intensive care units are anesthesiologists in our country, only 34% of the participants were aware of that.

Only 23% of the respondents knew that the anesthesiologists resuscitate patients. These findings are similar with the results of the previous studies in the UK and Caribbean (8,9).

Public image of anesthesiologists is important. Ross et al. argued that the increasing appreciation by the public will increase the ability to influence the provision of resources for the specialty (16).

The lack of recognition can affect anesthesiologists self-esteem, especially given the amount of effort required to achieve expertise (17). Irwin et al argued that poor public image is one of the reasons for job dissatisfaction of an anesthesia resident (18).

In conclusion, the present study pointed out poor knowledge of the public regarding the role of anesthesiologist. By making use of the media and the Internet, patient education about the roles and responsibilities of anesthesiologists may be improved. Furthermore, anesthesiologists should spend more time for the preoperative visit.

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APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire to determine the surgical patient's knowledge of the anaesthesiologist's role.

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Age

18-30 ☐ 51-70 ☐31-50 ☐ 71- ☐

2. Sex

Male ☐ Female ☐

3. Last level of schooling attained

None ☐Primary school ☐Secondary school ☐University ☐

4. The anaesthesiologist is a

Nurse ☐Physiotherapist ☐Technician ☐Doctor ☐Intern ☐Other ☐

5. How many surgeries did you have in the past?

None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐

If you have never met the
 anesthesiologist please ignore
 questions.....-.....

6. Did your anesthesiologist explain how he/she would put you to sleep or numb the area?	Yes	No	Do not recall
7. Did your anesthesiologist ask your preferences for being put to sleep?			
8. Did your anesthesiologist explain the possible complications?			
9. Did your anesthesiologist explain the possible side effects of drugs used?			
	Yes	No	No question asked
10. Did your anesthesiologist answer your questions to your satisfaction?			
	Anesth	Surgeon	They are equal
11. Whom do you consider to be more important?			
	Yes	No	Do not recall
12. Do you think that your anesthesiologist took care of you postoperatively			
13. Did your anesthesiologist explain his /her role to you?			
14. Do you think that the anesthesiologist was easy to talk to?			
15. Which of the following is one of the functions of the anesthesiologist?	Yes	No	Do not know
a.Determines fitness for surgery			
b.Obtains written consent			
c.Monitors vital signs during surgery			
d.Transfuses blood when needed			
e.Has a role in the intensive care unit			
f. Resuscitates patients			
g.Ensures that patient wakes up without any problem			
h.Ensures that patient is painfree			