



## UNDERSTANDING ANESTHESIA

*This information has been provided by the S.C. Society of Anesthesiologists.*

### WHAT IS ANESTHESIA?

**Anesthesia**—means without pain. It is the specialty of medicine for relief of pain and total care of the surgical patient, during and after surgery.

### ANESTHESIA PROFESSIONALS

**Anesthesiologist**—a physician specializing in the practice of anesthesiology and the use of anesthesia medicines.

### ANESTHESIA SUPPORT PERSONNEL

**Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)**—a registered nurse with additional training to administer anesthesia under a supervising physician.

**Anesthesiologist's Assistants**—physician's assistants with additional education and training in anesthesia and must work under the supervision of an anesthesiologist.

### TYPES OF ANESTHESIA

**General Anesthesia**—being "put to sleep" by giving IV medications and/or using gases to cause complete unconsciousness and loss of pain perception.

**Regional Anesthesia**—using medicine to block feeling to an area of the body. Patients are usually given medicine to relax them and reduce anxiety while undergoing the surgery. Examples of regional anesthesia include spinal block, epidural anesthesia, saddle blocks, etc.

**Monitored Anesthesia Care (MAC)**—often called local anesthesia with sedation. The patient is given enough sedation to make them unaware or less anxious during the surgery.

**Local Anesthesia**—using medicine in the area of surgery, either injection or topical to make the area numb. Usually, no other medicine is given.

### RISKS OF ANESTHESIA

It is impossible to list all possible risks but they include:

**Anesthetic agents**—there can be an adverse reaction to any agent but a listing of known drug allergies can decrease the possible risk.

**Pre-existing conditions**—medical conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, malnutrition, pregnancy and many others increase the risk of anesthesia.

Knowing the pre-existing conditions, the anesthesiologist's team will constantly monitor the patient with the ability to respond to any problems which may arise.

### PREPARING FOR ANESTHESIA

A pre-operative evaluation is performed by the anesthesiologist. This includes:

- a review of the medical history
- a discussion of the types of anesthesia and the risks of each
- specific instructions regarding when to stop eating/drinking before surgery
- what medicines should or should not be taken the morning of surgery

The pre-operative evaluation may take place:

- in a pre-operative clinic or area of the hospital
- at the bedside for patients in the hospital or
- over the phone

It is **extremely** important that the anesthesiologist have a complete list of all medicines taken regularly including prescription, over-the-counter and herbal medicines.



### Did you Know?

- There are approximately 500 anesthesiologists practicing in the state of South Carolina.
- The first intensive care unit was pioneered by a Danish anesthesiologist in Copenhagen in 1953 - a by-product of a devastating polio epidemic. Dr. Joe Redding, an anesthesiologist, started the first Intensive Care Unit at Johns Hopkins and headed the Critical Care Department at MUSC for many years.