

# In-Office Anesthesia after California Assembly Bill No. 2003

By Jeffrey P. Fisher, DDS

On January 1, 1999, AB 2003 became effective, mandating that medical insurance providers cover dental general anesthesia for children six years of age or younger when provided in a hospital or surgery center environment. What impact has this had on office-based general anesthesia provided by dental anesthesiologists?

I have been providing office-based general anesthesia for dentistry throughout the greater Sacramento area and inland valleys of central California since 2001. The number of general anesthetics I provided to patients in dental offices in 2004 compared to 2003 increased by 17.5 percent. Some might have thought that the number of patients seeking treatment in their dentists' offices would have declined with the option of medical coverage in the hospital. However, the opposite has occurred.

What is the reason for this increase? Why are dentists still staying in their own offices? And why are patients still willing to pay out of pocket for the option to receive care in their dentists' offices?

Dentists like the ability to treat fearful and uncooperative patients (toddlers, unmanageable children, phobic adults, and the developmentally disabled) in the convenience of their own offices because it is a professionally monitored setting that is comfortable, convenient, and familiar to them and their patients. By providing dentists with the option of in-office general anesthesia, I make it possible for them to enjoy the following benefits:

- They avoid the headaches involved in obtaining and maintaining hospital privileges.
- They are able to work in a familiar setting with their own staff.
- They don't have to worry about hauling special dental equipment to the hospital or forgetting any necessary supplies.
- They have more control over their patients' schedules.
- They are able to add regular dental patients to the schedule if the planned general anesthesia schedule falls apart due to patients' sickness, eating, or failure to meet their appointments.

These reasons all contribute to the decision many dentists make to use in-office general anesthesia.

Many patients are pleased to know that there is an in-office general anesthesia option. Some parents, even though general anesthesia is a covered benefit in the hospital for children 6 years old or younger, realize that with their deductible and co-pay the total cost to them will

often be more in the hospital than in the office. Parents like the idea of in-office general anesthesia because:

- In-office general anesthesia is less intimidating than the hospital operating room.
- Treatment begins very close to the actual scheduled appointment time, thus minimizing the amount of preoperative waiting for both patient and parent.
- They have the option to allow their children to sleep in, thus avoiding the drama often associated with children not being able to eat or drink prior to treatment.

I personally call all my patients before and after treatment. These conversations allow discussion and dialogue between me and the patient or parent. Particularly for parents of pediatric patients, getting to know and feeling comfortable with their doctor is vitally important, especially when general anesthesia is part of the operative course. Parents have told me that this forum of open communication relieves much of their apprehension and helps put their minds at ease.

The option of providing dental treatment under general anesthesia is becoming more and more popular in today's society. Whether the choice is in the hospital, an outpatient surgery center or in the dental office, it is important that dentistry continues to promote options that make treatment of fearful and uncooperative patients both available and accessible.

This article by Jeffrey P. Fisher, DDS, was published in the April 2005 issue of *The Nugget*, a publication of the Sacramento District Dental Society.