

## **Professional stress and the anesthesiologist-how evident is it?**

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### **Anesthesiology, a stressful profession**

There is no doubt that Anesthesiology as a profession is a source of stress for the physician.

In spite of the tremendous reduction in the rate of anesthesia morbidity and mortality, due to new technology, new drugs and higher educated professionals, Anesthesiology is becoming in the new millennium more and more dangerous for its practitioners. Anesthesiology is a stressful profession because a multifactorial etiology. One can only remember the fact that this is a service profession, dealing with a "temporary pharmacological intoxication, using many blind methods and producing from time to time complications difficult to accept by the patient or family, to understand that our daily activity is full of stressful events.

The stress of the anesthesiologist is a chronic one, but many adverse events can superimpose and accentuate acutely the psychological situation of the professional in the operating room or in the critical care environment (acute stress): a sudden deterioration of the patient stability, altercations with peers, etc.

The impact of stress on the anesthesiologist well being is obvious. It includes drug abuse, a high rate of suicide, the need for early retirement, and the burnout syndrome. Some earlier studies indicated that anesthesiologists develop malignancy in a higher rate than other professional groups, but lately it was shown that our average length of life increases all the time (Kats and Slade, J Clin Anesth 2006;18:405).

But even so, our quality of life is too often poor. We sleep less, we are overworked, we are very tired and when the fatigue conquers our brain, our ability to judge and take decisions is affected.

In a recent study done on 39 anesthesiologists (Gurman, Gidron, Gurski, unpublished data) we could prove that most of the subjects were found to be stressed (level of salivary cortisol) and with a tendency to burnout.

### **Remedies to be taken into consideration**

During the last years some authors concentrated on possible advises to be followed in order to improve not only our length of life but also its quality.

Since the etiologic factor of well being impairment is the stress (with its direct effects on cardiovascular system, nervous system AND coagulation) some remedies have been proposed for reducing the level of professional stress among anesthesiologists.

This is just a short list of proposals:

- \*early detection of stressed colleagues
- \*improving of human engineering to appease our daily activity
- \*education and self education regarding the discipline of work

\*development of humor as a self defense mechanism

\*a proper administration of leisure and self care

One of the ideas related to stress effects on coagulation is prophylactic administration of aspirin in antiplatelet dose, may be to be started earlier than indicated for other groups of population.

But the most important lesson of this interesting aspect of our activity is the creation of a proper attitude towards professional stress. Stress seems to be part of our daily professional activity. This is why its management should be an integral part of our education and training.

As the ASA Newsletter specified (2001;65:13), the time came for us to reverse the burden of proof in the interest of safety. **The next life we save might be our own.**