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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Analgesic Somnoform in Waterbury: “Nap-A-Minit” Adds Chlorides to the Bromide



From the Wood Library-Museum's Ben Z. Swanson Collection, this photograph (*right*) features signage (*left*) from a 1920s “Nap-A-Minit” dentist. From his office corner in Waterbury, Connecticut, Dr. Paul August Kumpitsch (1886 to 1949) was one of a large number of American dentists who so advertised their use of analgesic gas, either Somnoform or nitrous oxide-oxygen. Pioneered in Bordeaux, France, in 1901 by Dr. Georges Rolland, Somnoform was an eclectic mixture of ethyl chloride, methyl chloride, and ethyl bromide, in a 12:7:1 ratio. A topical vapocoolant, Somnoform's general anesthetic properties were revealed when patients began nodding off after the volatile liquid was sprayed on their gums and teeth. As with ethylene, in skilled hands, Somnoform could be administered to provide analgesia without rendering patients completely unconscious. Enthusiasm for using Somnoform waned due to its flammability and to a leading supplier's scandalous omission of ethyl bromide from distributed Somnoform. However, “Nap-A-Minit” persisted as a homonymous branding for oxygenated nitrous-oxide analgesia. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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