

BOOK REVIEW

Edward Lowenstein, M.D., Editor

Nitrous Oxide. EDITED BY EDMOND I. EGER II. New York, Elsevier Press, 1984. Pages: 369. Price: \$37.50.

It is an indication of the increasing complexity of life in general and medical practice in particular that a text of 369 pages with 21 chapters and 22 contributors can be produced about nitrous oxide. In 1964, Dr. Eastwood edited a text of 156 pages about nitrous oxide that included a seven-page chapter, written by Green, on The Toxicity of Nitrous Oxide. That chapter was preceded by a caveat that indicated that the material presented ". . . does not restrict usefulness in clinical anesthesia."

The text by Eger has a 20-page chapter by Brodsky on toxicity. It is both well written and disturbing. In addition, there are separate chapters on mutagenicity (10 pages) and the effects of nitrous oxide on methionine synthetase (20 pages). Add to these additional chapters detailing the respiratory effects of nitrous oxide (Eger), the cardiovascular effects (Eisele), the central nervous system effects (Frost), and the neuromuscular effects (Miller), and one begins to appreciate that

this simple drug used as an analgesic since 1779 is considerably more complex than generations of anesthesiologists were led to believe.

This book is well written, interesting to read, and amusing at times, though there is an occasional tendency for overkill. The last two chapters, one by Eger discouraging nitrous oxide use, and the other by Saidman and Hamilton advocating its use, attempt to put the issue in perspective and do so reasonably well. I suspect that most of us will agree with Dr. Hornbein's comments in the epilogue "I will continue to use nitrous oxide with a few more concerns and contraindications."

This book is a fascinating compendium of information about a very commonly used drug. I recommend it to everyone actively engaged in anesthesia practice with the sure knowledge that having read it one will never again add nitrous oxide to an anesthetic mixture without at least pausing to consider the implications.

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