

**PATIENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF ANESTHESIA  
AND THE ANESTHETISTS AT A TERTIARY HEALTH CARE  
FACILITY, GMC SRINAGAR- A CROSS SECTIONAL AND  
PROSPECTIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The anaesthetists have a very limited interaction with the patients. Most of the time that the anaesthetist spends with their patients is when they are unconscious or sedated. Hence the patients are not well aware about the multiple tasks that an anesthetist performs and their knowledge regarding anesthetists' commitments within and outside the operation room is very poor. The present study was conducted to know about the patient's knowledge and perception of anesthesia and the anesthetists at a tertiary health care facility. **Methodology:** Institution-based, cross-sectional study was conducted from March 2022 to December 2022, at Government Medical College Srinagar and its associated hospitals. After informed written consent, 1000 patients were asked to answer a standard questionnaire during the pre anaesthetic checkup to assess their knowledge and perception about anesthesia and the role of anaesthetist in the hospital. **Result:** "Anaesthetists are the essential oil in the machinery of the the hospital, but their work is often

not recognised by patients and sometimes by doctors too. The general perception of the public regarding anaesthetist's varied roles in perioperative period including the resuscitation in emergency services, critical care, management of chronic pain, and palliative care remains limited. **Conclusion:** Anaesthetists have a poor image among the public, many of whom do not even realise that they are doctors. Hence anaesthetists need to interact with

the patients and educate them about the important role that they play in patient management and well being.

**KEYWORDS:** Anaesthetists, Anaesthesia, Operation room, Knowledge, Limited.

## INTRODUCTION

The specialty of anesthesia has evolved tremendously over the past 50 years since the first anaesthetic agent was administered publicly by T.G. Morton in 1846. By the development of new anesthetic agents, techniques, instruments and new development in the standard multi chain monitoring system, this specialty has reached to new heights. However, despite of all these advancements, our patients are hardly aware of the role of anesthetist in the hospital healthcare delivery system and their knowledge regarding anesthetist's commitments and contribution within and outside the operating room is very poor.

There is a widespread and a common belief that the specialty of anesthesia carries a low profile when compared to other medical and surgical specialties.<sup>[1]</sup> The scope of Anesthesia at present is not limited to providing peri-operative patient care and acute pain services, but encompasses a wide spectrum encompassing critical care medicine, emergency services including resuscitation, chronic pain management, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, basic and advanced life support, disaster management and palliative care. However, the specialty-public bridges that include patient awareness, trust and confidence are not developed in anesthesia.<sup>[2]</sup>

Anesthesia has always been misconceived as a 'behind the scenes' specialty. Despite huge contribution of anaesthesia in providing health care facilities, there is little public knowledge regarding this specialty being one of the most dependable and major medical specialty. The people are unaware of its scope, the functions of anaesthetists, and the crucial and vital role anaesthetists play in saving lives of the patients in our healthcare delivery system. This lack of knowledge towards anaesthesia has also resulted in decreased curiosity and interest of medical students towards anaesthesiology as a future career plan.

Despite multitude of studies on patients and public perception of anesthesia, there has been no significant progress in the efforts to highlight this specialty to the general public.<sup>[3-8]</sup>

October 16th is celebrated every year as Anesthesia Day worldwide and to make people aware about the life sustaining and life preserving role of anaesthetists, public awareness

programmes are organized in various nations. However, recognition of the extensive duties of an anesthetist and their significant contributions to patient management and gratitude towards this specialty by the public is still limited.

## METHOD

This Prospective, Randomized, Cross sectional study was conducted in the Department of Anaesthesia and Critical Care Medicine, SMHS, Super Specialty Hospital and Bones and Joint Surgery Hospital which are the associated hospitals of Government Medical College, Srinagar from March 2022 to December 2022.

A questionnaire with 23 questions was prepared and after informed written consent, 1000 patients were asked to answer this standard questionnaire during their pre anaesthetic checkup to assess their knowledge and perception about anesthesia and the role of anaesthetist in patient care and health care services.

This questionnaire was provided in the regional language and English for the best understanding of the participants. An interpreter (a postgraduate anaesthesia student) was provided for help of illiterate or ignorant patients or those who required any help with the questionnaire. The survey was carried out by a team of consultant anesthetist and post graduate resident doctors posted for pre anaesthesia checkup.

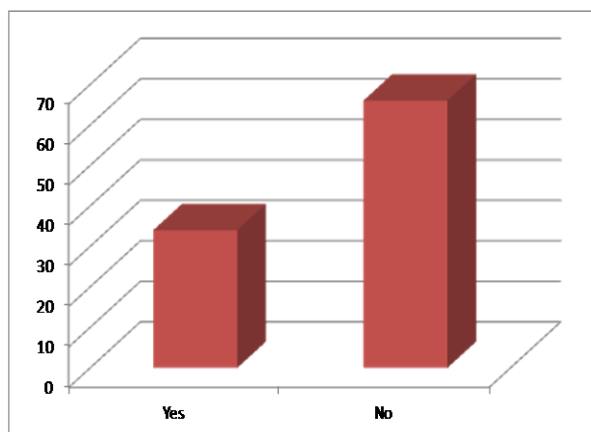
Statistical analysis: was done using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows from IBM Corp. (released 2020, Version 27.0. Armonk, NY, USA). Categorical variables were shown in the form of percentages and graphs.

## RESULTS

There were a total 1000 participants enrolled in the study.

Knowledge regarding Anesthetist being a doctor ?

Yes	34%
No	66%



Residence of the people who knew about anaesthetist being a specialized doctor

Variables	Frequency
<b>Residence</b>	
Urban	67%
Rural	33%

34% of the patients knew anaesthetist were doctors out of which 67% were from urban areas.

History of previous exposure to Anaesthesia

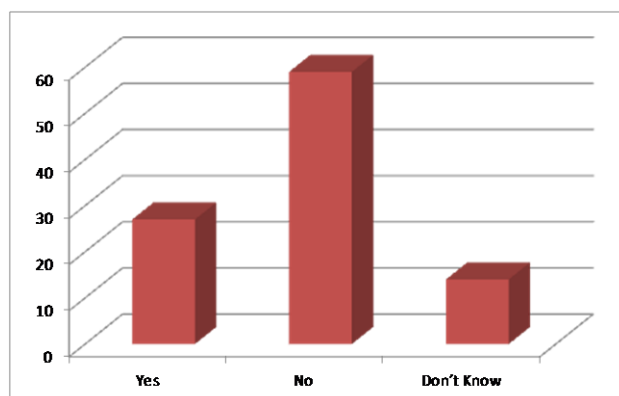
Variables	Frequency
<b>History of previous exposure to anaesthesia</b>	
Yes	26%
No	74%

Regarding the Type of Anaesthesia ?

General	60%
Spinal	22%
Regional	18%

Knowledge regarding the role of Anaesthetist in pre operative period ?

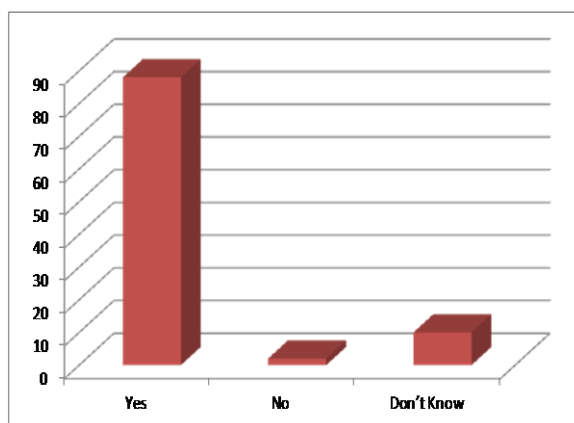
Yes	27%
No	59%
Don't Know	14%



Knowledge regarding the peri operative role of Anesthetist in operating room ?

- Putting Patient to sleep ?

Yes	88%
No	2%
Don't Know	10%

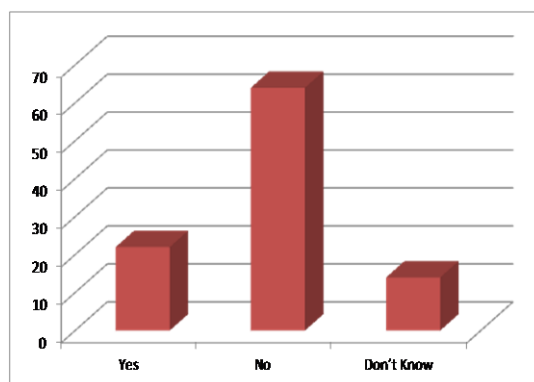


- Maintaining hemodynamics ?

Yes	55%
No	22%
Don't Know	23%

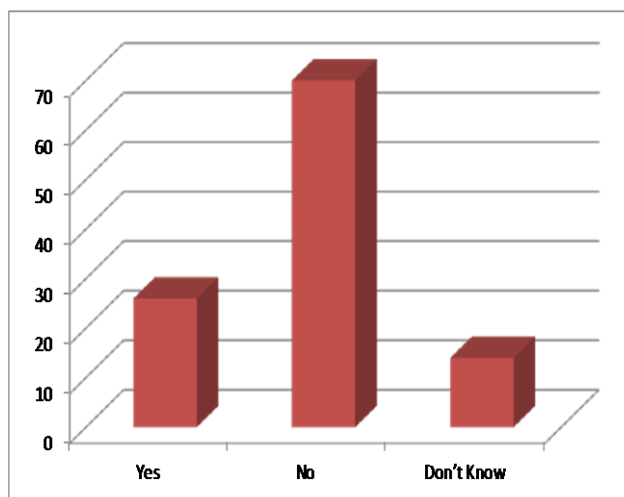
- Pain relief during surgery ?

Yes	22%
No	64%
Don't Know	14%



- Maintaining input/output ?

Yes	26%
No	70%
Don't Know	4%

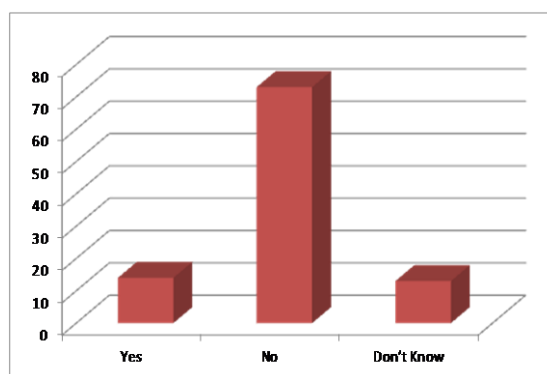


- Maintaining Blood loss ?

Yes	18%
No	69%
Don't Know	13%

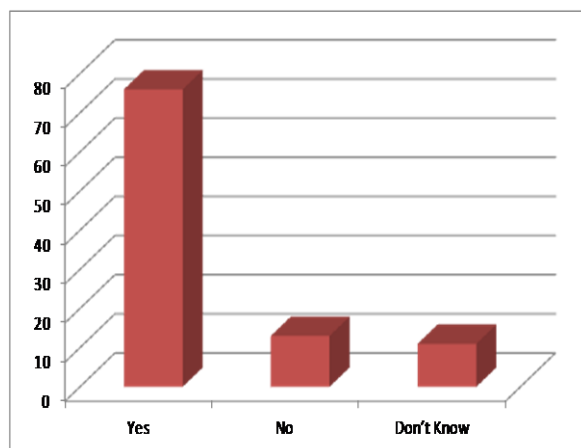
- Resuscitation & management of anticipated and unanticipated complications ?

Yes	14%
No by Surgeon	73%
Don't Know	13%



- Waking patient up ?

Yes	76%
No	13%
Don't Know	11%



The knowledge of patients about the role of anaesthetist in operating room was mostly confined to "putting patient to sleep and waking them up".

Knowledge regarding the role of Anesthetist in post operative period ?

- Post operative pain management ?

Yes	10%
No	77%
Don't Know	13%

- Post operative management of complications ?

Yes	10%
No	68%
Don't Know	22%

- Post operative monitoring ?

Yes	33%
No	57%
Don't Know	10%

Knowledge regarding the role of Anesthetist outside the operating room {NORA}?

- In Critical Care Units ?

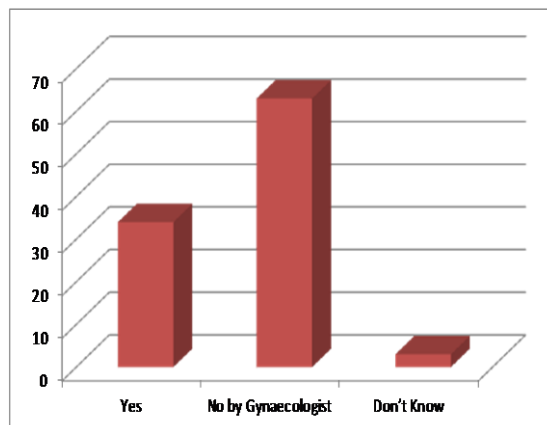
Yes	15%
No	68%
Don't Know	17%

- In Emergency and triage ?

Yes	12%
No	70%
Don't Know	18%

- In painless child birth?

Yes	34%
No by Gynaecologist	63%
Don't Know	3%



- In emergency resuscitation?

Yes	16%
No	49%
Don't Know	25%

- In Short procedures like Bronchoscopy

Endoscopy

ERCP

Colonoscopy

MRI

Cath & DSA lab

Yes	19%
No	51%
Don't Know	30%

- In chronic pain management ?

Yes	24%
No	66%
Don't Know	10%

In CPR, BLS, ACLS & disaster management ?

Yes	11%
No	53%
Don't Know	36%



Knowledge regarding the role of Anesthetist during Covid -19 outbreak ?

Yes	41%
No	49%
Don't Know	10%

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at Government Medical College, Srinagar and its associated hospitals on 1000 patients during their preanaesthetic checkup representing the general population coming for health care to this facility.

Anaesthetists are always being perceived as 'behind the scenes' doctors. This could be due to the limited time spent by an anaesthetist with the patients starting from just the pre-anaesthetic checkup, with no other pre operative visits and postoperative visits limited only to the post operative anaesthesia care unit {PACU} Hence the maximum time spent by an anesthetist with the patient is when they are under sedation or when the patient is unconscious.

Anaesthetists are also sometimes taken as assistants to the surgeons or working under the guidance of the surgeon as the primary doctor with whom the patient is familiar. Therefore, the concept of anaesthetists working independently from surgeons is poorly understood by our society. In our study also, only 34% of the patients knew about anaesthetists being a specialized medical doctor out of which 68% were from Urban area which is similar to the study conducted by Prasad et al.<sup>[9]</sup> The finding was also in concurrence with the studies done by various other scholars,<sup>[10,11,12,13,14,15]</sup> in which maximum people were unaware of the anaesthetist being a doctor.

In our study only 27% of the people were aware of the pre operative assessment and optimization of the patient's comorbidities and health issues done by the anaesthetists in consultation with the other physicians. Higher Percentages of the people had knowledge of anaesthetist making them sleep (88%) and waking them up (76%). This may be due to a general belief among people that anaesthesia is all about 'putting patients to sleep and waking them up'. This was in accordance with the study done by Baaj et al.<sup>[16]</sup> There was poor knowledge about the other peri-operative role of the anaesthetist in monitoring of the patient, management of complications, pain relief and resuscitation.

Patients' unfamiliarity of the wide range of vital roles of anaesthetists, especially those beyond the edges and boundaries of the operating rooms, is very poor worldwide.<sup>[17,18,19]</sup> Our

study found poor patient knowledge of the role of anaesthetists in postoperative management of patients, emergency care and resuscitation, management of the complications and pain management.

Although in majority of the countries, Intensive care units are looked after by the anaesthetists, patients' knowledge of their role in the intensive care unit is very poor. In our study, only 15% of the patients' had knowledge about the role of anaesthetist being the chief doctor in ICU and taking care and managing the critically ill patients. This result was similar to the study conducted by Swinhoe *et al.*<sup>[20]</sup>

There is even poorer patient knowledge of the role of anaesthetists in chronic pain management. In our study 76% of the people were unaware of anaesthetists managing chronic pain in patients suffering from malignancy and other ailments. This was in accordance with various other studies.<sup>[5,21,22]</sup> The awareness of the role of anaesthetist in labor analgesia is also limited 63% of the patients believed that gynaecologists are the ones who provide Epidural for painless child birth.

Our study also revealed limited knowledge of the patients regarding the role of anaesthetists in various day care procedures (19%) as well as the knowledge among people regarding the role of anaesthetists in CPR, BLS, ACLS and disaster management was also lacking. Only 11% correctly identified that the anaesthetist was a vital part of the emergency team.

Being experts in airway management, ventilator management critical care and resuscitation, anaesthetists have gained an important role in managing all facets of COVID-19. However in our study the role of anaesthetist in the management of covid-19 outbreak was also not much recognized. 41% of the patients could identify the gigantic contribution of the anaesthetist during the Pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

Anaesthetists make up the largest specialty in the hospital and play a critical part in its running. Without them, theatres, the labour ward, pain services, and the intensive care unit (ICU) would almost become defunct. The anaesthetist leads in coordinating the multidisciplinary team made up of surgeons, operating department assistants, theatre nurses, porters, and recovery staff.<sup>[23]</sup>

Anaesthesia has evolved as a separate specialty but the anaesthetist, ever engrossed in keeping the patient safe, has failed to highlight their pivotal role behind the curtain. Whilst he may fulfill many roles outside operating theatre, these roles are very rarely recognized to them by the patient. The general perception of the public regarding anaesthetist's varied roles in perioperative period including the resuscitation in emergency services, critical care, management of chronic pain, and palliative care remains limited. Lack of recognition and decreased appreciation by the patient contributes to the frustration of an anesthetists.<sup>[24]</sup>

Our study results gave an idea about the current state of patients' perception of anesthesia and anaesthetists. The limited interaction between the anaesthetist and the patient within the boundaries of the operation room is the prime reason for the lack of recognition and gratitude of the anaesthetist in the health-care system and thereby, a poor anaesthetist-patient relationship. The anaesthetist needs to be more interactive with the patients and give more of their time towards building and strengthening their relationship with the patients. Hence, it is the responsibility of the anaesthetists to educate the patients about their misconceptions about anaesthesia and demonstrate the anaesthesiologist's diverse responsibilities.

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