Happy gas after all – nitrous oxide ok for some in surgery

Laughing gas has an important function in the operating theatre in reducing chronic pain after surgery despite its links with post-operative wound infections and heart attack, a conference of anaesthetists will hear today Tuesday May 7.

Professor Matthew Chan from the department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has completed a study that concludes nitrous oxide, - also known as laughing gas or happy gas and regularly used in Australian surgery when a patient is anaesthetised - is suitable for use in some patients.

Nitrous oxide use in surgery declined in the last six years after an ANZCA Trials Group study found it increased the incidence of wound infection, cardiac events and other complications, Professor Chan will tell the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists annual scientific meeting.

“Some hospitals don’t use it at all anymore but in low-risk patients it remains effective in contributing to decreased post-operative chronic pain,” he says.

Professor Chan’s study shows the benefits of laughing gas are significant if patients are selected cautiously.

Other speakers include:

- Associate Professor Timothy Short: Predicting drug behaviour in the obese patient
- Dr Helen Crilly: The Australian and New Zealand Anaesthetic Allergy Group (ANZAAG) – A new resource for anaesthetic practice

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