

Friday September 13, 2013

New ways take the guesswork out of pain relief in surgery, conference hears

Ultrasound of the heart before surgery changed the diagnosis and management of 50 per cent of patients who received it and in the case of patients requiring hip fracture surgery, post-operative deaths were halved, a meeting of anaesthetists will hear today.

Dr David Canty will tell the meeting that the use of pre-operative ultrasound scans by anaesthetists had “exploded” in the last five years and early research showed a dramatic improvement in the overall health of those patients after surgery - especially non-cardiac patients who would not usually have a scan of the heart before an operation.

It was also guiding better delivery of epidurals for pregnant women during labour.

“The use of ultrasound by anaesthetists has changed dramatically in the last five or so years,” Dr Canty said.

“Now not a day would go by when an anaesthetist doesn’t get out an ultrasound to scan their patient.

“It takes a lot of the guesswork out of delivering an anaesthetic directly to a nerve.”

Another major gain of using heart ultrasound in non-cardiac patients, a relatively new practice in patients undergoing major surgery, is its ability to reveal a hidden heart problem and from that discovery, save the patient’s life.

“If there is a heart condition that could compromise outcomes of surgery this helps us get it right,” Dr Canty said.

Major surgery subjects a patient to the risk of heart failure because anaesthesia can place a great deal of on pressure on the heart.

Dr Canty predicts anaesthetic ultrasound will become routine practice for anaesthetists.

“It is a practice that is saving lives, but it is one that needs further research,” he said.

The ‘Controversies and practical solutions in perioperative medicine’ meeting of anaesthetists in Byron Bay this weekend will also hear:

- Screening patients for anaemia before operations is critical to improved health post-surgery.
- That “chronically critically ill” patients in intensive care (patients who survive but do not get better) are a significant social and economic burden

- Patients undergoing major surgery benefit significantly from learning meditation techniques they can use from the moment they emerge from anaesthesia in reducing the severity and intensity of pain

For further information and to interview Dr Canty or other speakers, please contact ANZCA Media Manager Ebru Yaman on 03) 8517 5303, 0408 259 369 or email eyaman@anzca.edu.au