

## **The great unsolved mystery: how does anaesthesia work?** **Tuesday May 4, 2010**

The anaesthetising properties of ether were demonstrated by William Morton in 1846. Yet 164 years later, no one knows how ether – or any of the inhaled drugs used in anaesthesia – work.

Visiting New York speaker Professor Steve Shafer says the best minds in the world have been baffled by “the greatest unsolved mystery in pharmacology”. Professor Shafer, from Columbia University, is giving his keynote address today (**Tuesday May 4**) at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists in Christchurch.

Also speaking today:

- Former Swiss airforce colonel and commercial airline captain Mr Werner Naef will talk about a fatal plane crash that could have been avoided had the early warning signals in the pilot’s behaviour been recognised and acted upon in the session “**Why bad things happen to good people**”. Now a communication and stress management specialist, Mr Naef trains people who work in stressful environments, such as management or in hospitals, using recognition of words, tones, gestures, postures and facial expressions that show when thought and speech patterns change indicating that a psychological failure mechanism has started.
- **Is Tony Abbott a freak of nature?** Associate Professor Mike Hamlin will tell the meeting just what athletes, such as the Australian Opposition leader, go through in preparing for and competing in events like the Ironman Australia Triathlon. In his paper “Ironman or madman? The physiological demands and consequences of extreme ironman, triathlon and ultra-endurance training and racing” Associate Professor Hamlin describes the “freaks of nature who choose to push themselves to the utmost limits of their body’s abilities”.
- Research by a Melbourne team shows an association between excessively deep anaesthesia and poor outcomes, including heart attack, stroke and even death, in the long term. **Professor Kate Leslie** will present the findings in her paper “BIS and its effect on outcomes related to death, stroke and MI”. She says the results are preliminary and need to be confirmed with a larger study.

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**The program and abstracts from today’s sessions can be found at [www.anzca.edu.au](http://www.anzca.edu.au)**