

or pain

of medicine's team—the anesthesiologist.

before you check out. It is his responsibility to put you into the best possible physical and emotional condition, and to keep you that way until you're well again and ready to go home.

MEDICAL research has given the anesthesiologist a steadily growing number of new and improved tools to work with. As a result, in most hospitals today, anesthetics can be formulated to fit the needs of each patient.

Special sedatives are available to relieve the fears of the overly nervous individual. For example, a patient with a weak heart who comes in for an appendectomy probably will receive a different anesthetic than a similar patient who suffers from a kidney ailment.

More and more anesthesiologists have begun using drugs designed to erase the memory of the operating room from the patient's mind. One such drug given is sodium pentothal—the so-called "truth serum"—or one of its derivatives.



Another advance has been in the use of muscle relaxants for certain types of surgery. One of the most common is curare, derived from a deadly arrow poison used by South American Indians.

With curare and similar compounds, the patient isn't put into quite so deep a sleep, and his convalescence is often shortened as a result.

This shorter convalescence may point the way for easing the chronic shortage of nurses, since less time per patient will lessen nursing requirements for hospitals. Also predicted is greater use of general anesthetics in office practice by physicians, further easing the strain on hospital facilities.

ONE OF the main reasons you have less to fear from major surgery today has nothing to do with drugs. It's simply that now, more patients learn beforehand what's going to happen to them.

Not long ago, most patients were told little or nothing about how and when they were going to be put to sleep, and for how long. As a result, when the time came to put a mask over the patient's face, or administer a hypodermic needle or pill, he would often resist. Today, however, the anesthesiologist visits the patient the day before surgery and explains the procedures to be used, thus allaying his fears.

"Usually we don't hide anything," says one specialist. "If there's going to be pain, we tell how long it will last, and how severe it will be. You'd be amazed to see the calming effect this frankness produces. The patient stops worrying because he knows what to expect. And often, by not worrying, he does a great deal to speed his own recovery."



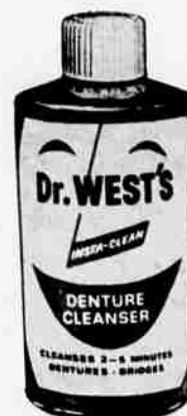
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