

How Do Patients Assess Anaesthetists?

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Introduction: Opinions are often expressed about the characteristics of anaesthesia or anaesthetists that are preferred by patients. However, there is limited scientific evidence for many of the opinions held.

Method: Consecutive patients presenting to a University Teaching Hospital operating theatre were studied. Important characteristics of anaesthesia, surgery, anaesthesia staff, and postoperative pain management were recorded. Patients were interviewed on the day after surgery by a small team of independent interviewers using a structured interview and standard 5 point scoring system. The interview assessed satisfaction in addition to the patient's anxiety, perception of risk and various features of the anaesthetic management.

Results: 2689 patients were interviewed. 92% of patients would recommend their anaesthetist to a good friend. 96% rated their anaesthetic experience as good or very good. Factors strongly associated with patients recommending their anaesthetist are shown in Table 1. No other feature of the anaesthetic, surgery, anaesthetic staffing or patient characteristic was strongly associated. The patient's overall rating of their anaesthesia experience was strongly associated with the above factors plus PONV and the patient's assessment of pain management.

Conclusion: Patient satisfaction appears to be primarily associated with the anaesthetist's skills in communication and interaction. Patients consider physical symptoms such as PONV and inadequate pain management in their rating of the anaesthetic, but appear to not feel these are important when assessing the individual anaesthetist.

Table 1. Factors associated with the response to: "If you could, would you choose the same anaesthetist again?"

Variable	R	95% CI of R		p
		Lower	Upper	
Confidence in anaesthetist	0.29	0.22	0.35	0.0001
Amount of information	0.21	0.17	0.25	0.0001
Friendly anaesthetist	0.20	0.14	0.26	0.0001
Gentle anaesthetist	0.15	0.12	0.22	0.0001
Technical skills	0.13	0.08	0.18	0.0001
Amount of time with anaesthetist	0.06	0.01	0.10	0.02
Previous anaesthetic difficulties	0.09	-0.01	0.18	0.04
Age 40-65	0.07	0.01	0.12	0.03