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CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ANESTHETICS AND SEDATIVES IN CHILDREN December 2012

Each year, millions of young children require surgery and other procedures for serious or life-threatening medical conditions or to improve their quality of life. Anesthetic and sedative drugs are widely used to help ensure the safety, health, and comfort of children undergoing these procedures. However, increasing evidence from research studies suggests the benefits of these agents should be considered in the context of their potential to cause harmful effects.

Previous research in young animals and children has raised concerns that exposure to commonly used anesthetics may produce adverse neurobehavioral effects. However, these studies had limitations that prevent experts from drawing conclusions on whether the harmful effects were due to the anesthesia or to other factors, including surgery, hospitalization, or pre-existing conditions. Furthermore, the findings in children have been mixed, with some studies of infants and young children undergoing anesthesia or sedation finding long-term deficits in learning and behavior while others have not.

Clearly, additional research is urgently needed to identify any possible risks to young children. In the absence of conclusive evidence, it would be unethical to withhold sedation and anesthesia when necessary. Instead, healthcare providers should do the following:

- Discuss with parents and other caretakers the risks and benefits of procedures requiring anesthetics or sedatives, as well as the known health risks of *not treating* certain conditions
- Stay informed of new developments in this area
- Recognize that current anesthetics and sedatives are necessary for infants and children who require surgery or other painful and stressful procedures

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