



Testimony to Senate B&P on Pediatric Sedation February 13, 2017

I am Dr. Guy Acheson, a past president of the California Academy of General Dentistry.

The California Academy of General Dentistry is a component of The Academy of General Dentistry; the single national organization that represents only general dentists.

I speak today as both a representative of the California Academy of General Dentistry and as a practicing general dentist who uses sedation in my office and treats patients who require general anesthesia in a hospital or surgery center using the services of an anesthesiologist.

General dentists are typically the first dentists that children are introduced to. Tooth decay in very young children is unfortunately what motivates many parents to take their child for their first dental visit. Sadly, pain from advanced dental decay is still a frequent complaint at the first dental visit.

General dentists and pediatric dentists can safely and lovingly complete most dental procedures on young children by using body language, voice control, and other techniques that gain the young patient's trust. For many children this is the first time they have had a stranger try to touch them inside the mouth, which is a very personal space. Then we go further and try to place foreign objects such as dental instruments and smelly, weird tasting things into their mouths. We are successful with most children but many children will not accept this situation and act out as an act of self-protection that makes typical dental care not safe.

You cannot rationalize with a very young child. If you cannot gain the child's trust and cooperation you are left with using some form of restraint to allow safe and properly performed dental services. Restraint typically takes the form of either physical restraints or sedation.

I am a dentist who treats patients of all ages. I use sedation in my office to help many patients overcome their fears and anxieties toward dental treatment and allow them to receive dental care. I interview every patient on what they feel lead to their fears about dental care and to seek sedation services. The overwhelming majority cite bad experiences at the dentist as a child. Being held down against their will. Being wrapped in a blanket to immobilize their arms and legs. Having their mouths forced open and held open while hands and instruments are being used in their mouths. These patients almost universally

report that they experienced pain during this process. General anesthesia provides a way to have the child perfectly relaxed to allow the safe and meticulous delivery of dental services. With general anesthesia the child will not have any memories of receiving dental care. In most cases the child will not require any shots of local anesthetic so when they awake from sedation they do not have a strange feeling face that they do not understand. In most cases it allows the completion of all the child's dental treatment needs in one visit.

There are many recognized barriers to dental care for adults and children. The cost of care, the number and location of providers, whether dental insurance is available to help with costs; these are the most commonly recognized and discussed. Fear is also a barrier to care that doesn't seem to get the attention it should. When we see children who would be best served by providing care using general anesthesia, the concerns that parents have towards their children being 'put to sleep' can be significant. The news that any child had a poor outcome while being treated under sedation just fuels their fears of the risks associated with sedating their child.

The Dental Board's report has determined that the risks associated with sedation in any form for children are very low. The report explains clearly that there will never be zero risk, but that the risks in California are consistent with the best results anywhere investigated. The proposed changes in this report, eliminating the operator/anesthetist model, by requiring for children under the age of 7 to have general anesthesia delivered and monitored by a provider other than the treating dentist, gives us one more assurance to parents that their child will be treated with the highest level of vigilance possible.

Children are our most special patients. Everything is new to them. Their impressions of the world and people are formed by all of their early experiences. For children who have extensive dental care needs or cannot cooperate for appropriate dental care, we feel that general anesthesia needs to be available and seriously considered to avoid making dental care a traumatic event that will shape their feelings about dentistry in a negative light. Children cannot give consent; therefore, we must provide the very safest environment for all situations when providing dental care.

I want to emphasize that for the vast majority of dentists the decision to specify the use of general anesthesia to provide dental care is made with great care and deliberation. Years of experience using every technique available to provide care to resistant and special needs patients allows a practitioner to develop a very good sense of when general anesthesia should be the first choice. Our over-riding concerns are for the safety and well-being of the patient. The well-being of the patient includes not inflicting emotional or psychological harm as well as providing an environment where the best possible dental care can be provided.

The California Academy of General Dentistry's opinions on pediatric sedation guidelines are best reflected in the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's published guidelines. We are very happy that the Dental Board of California's suggested changes to guidelines for general anesthesia for children under the age of 7 closely follows those published opinions. The California Academy of General Dentistry supports the Dental Board of California's proposed changes to general anesthesia regulations and guidelines that are being presented to you.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Guy E. Acheson', written in a cursive style.

Guy E. Acheson, DDS, MAGD
Past President, California Academy of General Dentistry