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*****Anesthesiologists debate use of laughing gas.

DALLAS--Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) is the cornerstone of modern anesthesiology.

Some of the world's outstanding researchers in anesthesiology will meet in Dallas May 2 to debate "Should we continue to use nitrous oxide?" Used by paramedics at the scene of a car accident, used by dentists during tooth extraction and used by anesthesiologists during labor, delivery and virtually every kind of surgery, the gas is popular because it "greatly relieves the patient's anxiety and raises the pain threshold."

Some researchers will be presenting evidence, however, that suggests the possibility of liver, kidney and neurological injury from nitrous oxide use. Also some have evidence the gas causes cancer, abortion and birth defects.

"These things are just in the research stage and are far from being proved. But as the 'professors' club,' we need to consider even the possibilities of toxic effects," says Dr. A.H. Giesecke, Jenkins Professor of Anesthesiology at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas. Giesecke is coordinating the 27th Annual Meeting of the Association of University Anesthetists at the Fairmont Hotel and the health science center May 1-4.

Nitrous oxide is one of the safest and best anesthetics available, says Giesecke. It is especially helpful in the case of accident victims because it relieves pain while the patient is inhaling it. But when the patient stops breathing it in, the gas is exhaled. So the pain is present for diagnosis in the Emergency Room. Morphine and other drugs mask the pain, interfering with diagnosis of injuries.

Dr. E.I. Eger from University of California, San Francisco, will chair the nitrous oxide program at 2 p.m., May 2, at the Fairmont.

Scientific papers will also be presented during the four-day meeting.

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