10.10: Anesthetics

As a nurse, you may care for a patient prior to surgery (preoperative), during surgery (perioperative), or after surgery (postoperative). One of your roles is to monitor your patient’s vitals signs, paying close attention to respiratory status (respiratory rate, depth, quality, and SpO2). You will also assess LOC (level of consciousness) and pain level. Below is a description of the types of anesthetics.

Local

Local anesthetic is when a medication (e.g., lidocaine) is injected into the skin at the site of the procedure to achieve numbness for procedures like suturing.

Conscious Sedation

Conscious sedation is a combination of medications that allow the patient to be relaxed (midazolam) and free of pain (e.g., fentanyl) during a medical procedure (e.g., colonoscopy). This allows the patient to remain awake and aware, without feeling discomfort. The patient may or may not be able to speak or respond in this state.

General Anesthesia

General anesthesia is a medication-induced reversible unconsciousness with loss of protective reflexes. Arousal, even to painful stimuli, cannot occur. General anesthesia requires the establishment and maintenance of airway control. Propofol is an example of an intravenous general anesthetic. The intravenous (IV) injection of propofol induces anesthesia within 40 seconds from the start of injection.

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