



Beyond the Procedure:

Educating Patients About Anesthesia

Understanding patient anxiety, improving communication, and using trusted resources to build confidence in anesthesia care



Session description

Patient education is an essential component of safe, patient-centered anesthesia care.

This lesson explores common misconceptions, fears, and knowledge gaps surrounding anesthesia, the impact they can have on the patient experience, and the important role CRNAs play in fostering understanding, confidence, and psychological safety.

Learners will examine practical communication strategies and discover how trusted resources, including Anesthesia Answers, can support more effective patient education before, during, and after anesthesia care.



Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- + Identify common patient fears, misconceptions, and knowledge gaps related to anesthesia care.
- + Explain why communication and health literacy are important components of patient safety.
- + Apply practical communication strategies to improve patient understanding and trust.
- + Describe how patient education resources can extend CRNA-patient conversations beyond the bedside.

CENTRAL QUESTION

How can future CRNAs help improve patient understanding of anesthesia and build trust through effective communication?

Imagine you're meeting your patient 30 minutes before their surgery.

QUESTIONS

- + What anesthesia questions do you think they'll ask?
- + What misconceptions might they have?
- + How would you help them feel informed and confident?



Consider patient perspective

Common questions and fears

- + “Will I wake up?”
- + “Will I feel anything during surgery?”
- + “Who will be taking care of me?”
- + “Is anesthesia dangerous?”
- + “What happens if something goes wrong?”
- + “Will I be in pain afterward?”

Emotional experience

- + Fear of the unknown
- + Loss of control
- + Anxiety about safety
- + Previous negative healthcare experiences
- + Not knowing what questions to ask



The challenge

- + **Patients often don't understand anesthesia—or the professionals who provide it.**
- + **These fears are understandable, but many are rooted in misinformation or limited understanding.**
- + **Common barriers**
 - + Feeling anxious or overwhelmed
 - + Having limited time before surgery
 - + Receiving large amounts of information at once
 - + Struggling to understand complex medical terminology
 - + Relying on inaccurate or incomplete online information
 - + Having varying levels of health literacy



Common misconceptions

Patients may believe:

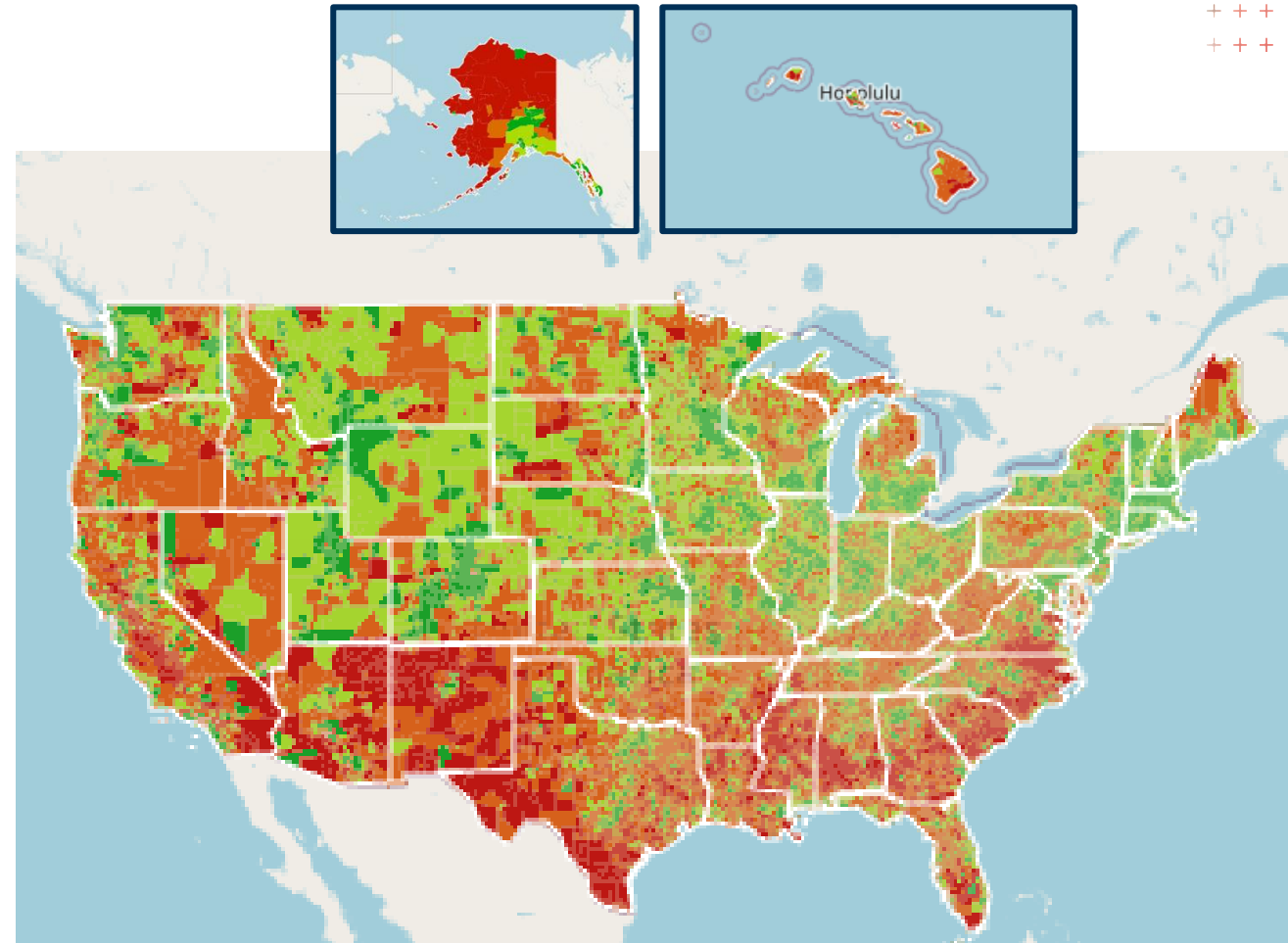
- + Anesthesia is simply “being put to sleep.”
- + The anesthesia provider is not involved beyond the beginning of surgery, or they will be alone while under.
- + Asking questions is unnecessary because anesthesia is routine.
- + They cannot communicate concerns before or after anesthesia.
- + Pain after surgery means anesthesia was unsuccessful.
- + Certain fears or concerns are “not important enough” to mention.

Misunderstanding anesthesia can affect:

- + Patient anxiety
- + Trust in the healthcare team or system
- + Communication before surgery
- + Patient expectations and satisfaction

Health literacy

- + Patients often process complex health information while experiencing stress, fear, pain, and uncertainty.
- + Health literacy is a shared responsibility. CRNAs must help make information clear, accessible, and actionable.
- + Health literacy can support:
 - + Safer clinical outcomes
 - + Improved patient experience
 - + Shared decision-making
 - + Trust and confidence in care



Health literacy rates by U.S. county, 2011–2013:
Quartile 4 (highest), Quartile 3, Quartile 2, Quartile 1 (lowest)



Patient education = patient safety

- + **Patient education is a patient safety intervention.**
- + **Effective education helps patients:**
 - + Share important health information
 - + Voice concerns and ask questions
 - + Understand expectations and instructions
 - + Participate in decisions about their care
- + **Clear understanding → better communication → improved preparation → safer anesthesia care**



CRNA as educator & advocate

Before anesthesia

- + Explain what to expect
- + Address fears & misconceptions
- + Identify concerns
- + Answer questions

During Anesthesia

- + Presence
- + Communication
- + Reassurance
- + Advocacy for patient safety

After Anesthesia

- + Reinforce understanding
- + Help process the experience
- + Answer questions
- + Support recovery expectations

Communication is more than a soft skill;
it's an essential part of anesthesia care.
Every patient interaction is an opportunity
to **build trust** and **promote safety**.



Communication strategies

ASK

Understand patient's perspective

- + What do you already know about anesthesia?
- + What questions or concerns do you have?
- + What worries you most?

CONFIRM

Ensure understanding

- + Normalize and encourage questions
- + Use teach-back method
- + Clarify misunderstandings

EXPLAIN

Help improve understanding

- + Use plain language instead of medical jargon
- + Connect information to the patient's situation
- + Address common questions proactively

REINFORCE

Extend the conversation

- + Provide trusted resources
- + Encourage ongoing learning



Communication approach

What to avoid

- + Dismissing concerns (“Don’t worry, this is routine”)
- + Assuming patients understand the anesthesia experience
- + Overloading patients with unnecessary information
- + Using unfamiliar medical terminology

What to do instead

- + Acknowledge concerns
- + Normalize questions
- + Invite conversation
- + Provide clear explanations
- + Model patience and open-mindedness
- + Help ease fears and anxieties



Extending the conversation

Strategies and tools exist to support meaningful patient education.

- + Printed handouts
- + Professional society resources
- + Hospital education materials
- + Trusted online resources

**Patient education often continues after the preoperative conversation.
Resources can help patients:**

- + Review information later
- + Share information with family
- + Prepare additional questions
- + Access reliable information outside the healthcare setting



Putting in the practice

A patient confides: *“I’m scared I won’t wake up after anesthesia.”*

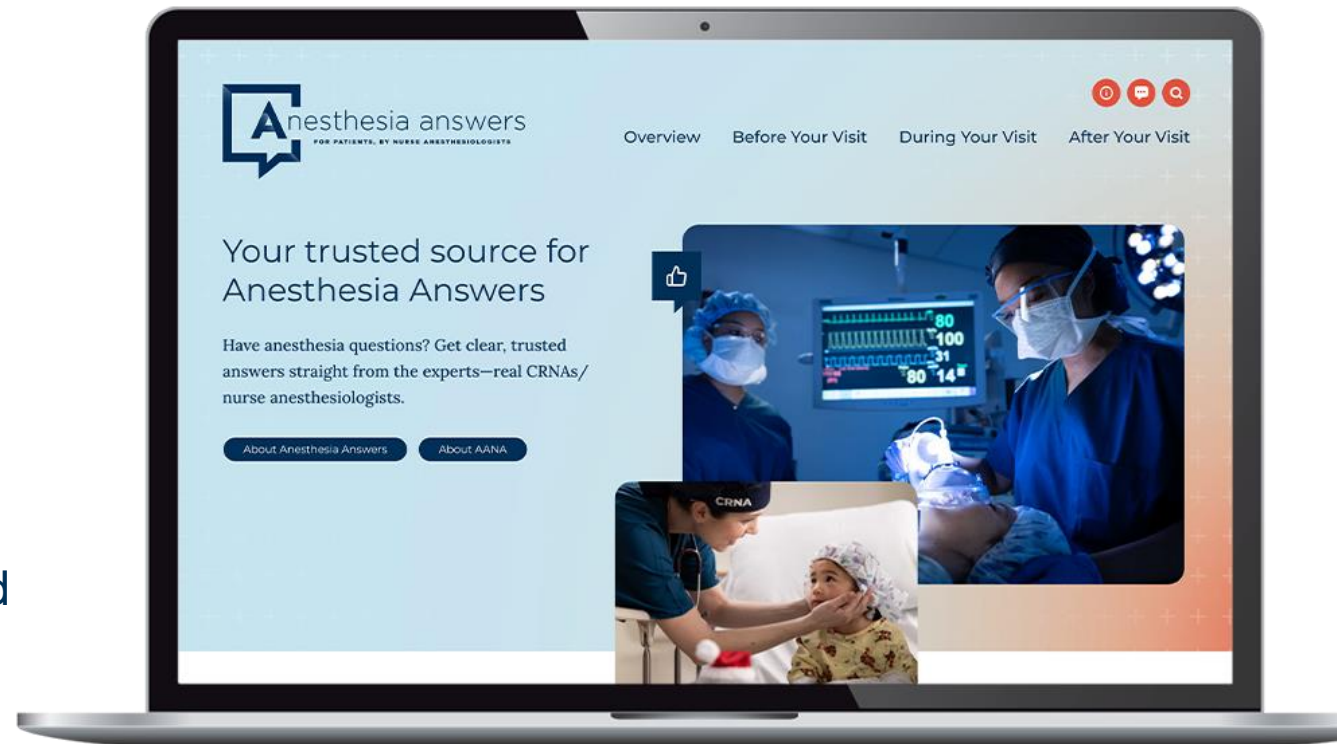
- + What concern may be underneath this question?
- + How would you respond?
- + What communication strategy applies?
- + What information does this patient need?
- + What resource could support this conversation?

Take 2 minutes to discuss with a partner.

Why Anesthesia Answers?

Anesthesia Answers is a patient education website that supports patient-provider conversations.

- + Accessible, trustworthy anesthesia information
- + Available to anyone, anywhere, anytime
- + Supports better understanding of anesthesia care and providers
- + Supports conversations between patients and anesthesia professionals





How to use it

CRNAs and organizations use Anesthesia Answers for:

- + Preparing patients before surgery
- + Addressing common questions and misconceptions
- + Supporting ongoing patient education
- + Extending conversations beyond limited preoperative time

Organizations integrate it into daily practice by:

- + Sharing the website during pre-operative visits and patient communications
- + Including website URL in patient education workflows (patient portals, discharge instructions, etc.)
- + Using the website as a resource during bedside conversations

More on Anesthesia Answers



Watch on YouTube: www.exampleURL.com



Takeaways

- + Patient education is part of quality anesthesia care.
- + Every patient interaction is an opportunity to build trust.
- + Communication is a clinical skill that supports safety and patient-centered care.
- + Clear explanations can reduce uncertainty and improve the patient experience.
- + Trusted resources like Anesthesia Answers can help extend conversations beyond the bedside.



Continue the conversation

Use the accompanying Discussion Guide to explore:

- + Patient misconceptions about anesthesia
- + Clinical communication strategies
- + Health literacy and patient safety
- + The CRNA's role as educator and advocate
- + Integrating patient education resources into practice



Beyond the Procedure

**Patient education is part of safe, patient-centered anesthesia care.
Every conversation is an opportunity to build knowledge and trust.**

CONTINUE EXPLORING WITH:

Discussion guide | Learning activity | Anesthesia Answers