

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Doctors Day: A time to think about health care

Today is an important anniversary. On March 30, 165 years ago, Dr. Crawford Long administered the first anesthetic. James Venable, the patient that day, swore afterward that he miraculously felt nothing during the surgical removal of his neck tumor. Thus began anesthesia, the ability to relieve any degree of pain, and the greatest miracle of modern medicine. Anesthesia, an American discovery, has allowed the development of today's sophisticated and interventional health care.

Modern surgery and anesthesia inspire awe and hope. Doctors repair tears and clogs, remove diseased tissues and cancers, and replace worn-out parts. More than half of surgical patients today arrive and leave the hospital on the day of surgery. The number of surgical operations in the United States now exceeds 40 million annually.

My father, at age 89, has replacement knee joints and an artificial hip. He plays golf twice a week. He and others are enjoying modern health care.

Anesthesia so revolutionized health care, and its administration so epitomizes the power of physicians to heal, that Congress designated March 30 as Doctors Day.

The first anesthetic was gaseous diethyl ether, now a historical curiosity. Anesthetics today are potent, nonflammable, focused and safe. And medical advances continue. Both buildings under construction at the WVU Health Sciences Center will house research institutes — one for neurosciences, and one for prevalent diseases.

Our well-being depends on what we know and do. If we eat balanced meals, maintain normal weights, exercise regularly and don't smoke, we're likely to stay healthy. As an anesthesiologist, I observe that those who follow such common-sense medical advice have an easier time with surgery. This spring, anesthesiologists nationally will launch a

smoking education program. When we talk preoperatively with patients who smoke, we'll encourage them to quit, offer information about how to do this, and refer them to a specialized program. Surgical patients who don't smoke have fewer infections and better wound healing than those who do.

Today is a good time to think about personal health and recognize the miracles of modern health care. While the hospitals in Morgantown celebrate Doctors Day, the doctors are thanking the teams that help them help people. The origin of Doctors Day is anesthetic pain relief, the priority is personal involvement in healthcare, and the goal is global well-being.

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