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Use and abuse of nitrous oxide in dentistry

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Nitrous oxide is a colorless and virtually odorless gas with a faint, sweet smell. It is a safe and effective tool used in dental clinics to reduce anxiety, produce analgesia, and cause the depression of the central nervous system (CNS), leading to the sensation of euphoria with little effect on the respiratory system. It also enhances effective communication between the patient and their healthcare provider. The decision to use nitrous oxide/oxygen must take into consideration the alternative behavioral guidance modalities, the patient's dental needs, the effect on the quality of dental care, the patient's emotional development, and the patient's physical considerations.

However, there has been a marked increase in the abuse of nitrous oxide by healthcare providers (i.e., dentists) and patients alike. One of the possible reasons for this abuse could be its affordable pricing and easy accessibility. Healthcare providers have become more inclined to utilize nitrous oxide as an overall calming tool, unable or unwilling to resort to other behavioral management techniques. Additionally, the use of nitrous oxide provides them with an easy excuse to add additional charges to the patient's bill. On the other hand, the patients themselves are seemingly unaware of the consequences of the overuse of nitrous oxide and continually request it even when it is not strictly necessary, leading them to become dangerously addicted to the substance, and also slowly becoming immune to its effect. This leads to their becoming completely dependent on the nitrous oxide and unable to undergo any dental procedures without its aid.

Biography

Ebtissam Murshid is an Associate Professor and Consultant in Pediatric Dentistry at King Saud University, College of Dentistry, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She obtained her Bachelor degree in Dental Surgery from King Saud University College of Dentistry, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She achieved a Master of Science in Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics, School of Dentistry University of Michigan, Michigan, USA followed by another Master of Dental Public Health, School of Public Health University of Michigan, Michigan, USA and finally a Doctorate of Public Health, Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health University of Michigan, USA. She is a member in a number of national and international dental and autistic societies. She has a multiple publications in different international journals. Currently, her research focuses on autism and dental health of autistic children.

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