Can Surgery and Anaesthesia Affect Memory?

Release Date:
Thursday, February 22, 2018 12:01 am EST

Terms:
Anaesthesia  Wiley Research Headlines  Health Sciences

Dateline City:
Chichester

Contacts:
Penny Smith +44 (0) 1243 770448 sciencenewsroom@wiley.com

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In the study of 312 participants who had surgery and 652 participants who had not (with an average age in the 50s), surgery between tests was associated with a decline in immediate memory by one point out of a possible maximum test score of 30 points. Memory became abnormal in 77 out of 670 participants with initially normal memory comprising 18% of those who had had surgery compared with 10% of those who had not. No differences in other measures of memory and executive function were observed between participants having and not having surgery. Reduced immediate memory scores at the second visit were significantly associated with the number of operations in the preceding nine years. Working memory decline was associated with longer cumulative operations.

“The cognitive changes we report are highly statistically significant in view of the internal normative standards we employ, and the large sample size of the control, or non-surgery, population. But the cognitive changes after surgery are small—most probably asymptomatic and beneath a person’s awareness,” said senior author Dr. Kirk Hogan, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health. “The results await confirmation both in follow-up investigations in our own population sample after more surgeries in aging participants, and by other investigators with other population samples.”

Dr. Hogan noted that it is too early to recommend any changes in clinical practice regarding prevention, diagnosis, management, and prognosis of cognitive changes after surgery.

Additional Information

Link to Study: http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/anae.14216

About Journal

Anaesthesia is the official journal of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland and is international in scope and comprehensive in coverage. It publishes original, peer-reviewed articles on all aspects of general and regional anaesthesia, intensive care and pain therapy, including research on equipment. Although primarily a clinical journal, we welcome submissions or basic science papers if the authors can demonstrate their clinical relevance. The median time from submission to first decision is 12 days. There is also an active online correspondence website, where you can post and read article-related correspondence.

Language:
English