

HELLO OTHER

Book One – DISCOVERY

By S C Dinsdale

Chapter 6. Consent 103

...One evening on duty early in the rotation, I am called down to Fracture Clinic to see a woman with a dislocated shoulder. Her story is vague and her breath smells of alcohol. Unfortunately, she cannot remember exactly how many drinks she has had, so I choose a cautious dose of pain relief and sedation. Alcohol is a general anaesthetic, and aside from being dangerous in overdose, it increases the effects of other sedating drugs. After speaking with Mick by phone, he agrees to come to ED and asks me to set everything up. Junior house officers are not permitted to give narcotics or sedation intravenously without supervision, due to the risk of inhibiting a person's automatic drive to breathe.

When Mick arrives, I inform him about the unknown quantity of alcohol this young person has on board. After he checks and approves my choice of conservative doses, I begin to inject the diluted medicines slowly into her vein, pausing periodically to assess her breathing. Following several pauses, despite being reminded about the alcohol, Mick loses patience.

"Come on, you can inject faster than that!"

"No," I reply firmly once more. "Look, her breathing rate has slowed."

"Let me take over!"

As I step obediently out of the way, Mick reaches for the syringe and promptly empties the remaining contents into her vein, followed by a quick flush of saline. Within thirty seconds, she stops breathing...

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