Anesthesiology training is unique in that much of the learning occurs in classic apprenticeship style. As a result, it is common for supervisors to quote aphorisms, concise statements or ‘pearls’ of advice. Not all aphorisms will be based on evidence, and many are rooted in personal experience, but absence of evidence is not absence of evidence. Aphorisms function as an aide-memoire, a narrative tool, to inform clinical judgment, to reinforce professional behavior, and to afford a means of professional identity.

**Introduction**

- Anesthesiology training is unique in that much of the learning occurs in classic apprenticeship style.
- As a result, it is common for supervisors to quote aphorisms, concise statements or ‘pearls’ of advice.
- Not all aphorisms will be based on evidence, and many are rooted in personal experience, but absence of evidence is not absence of evidence.
- Aphorisms function as an aide-memoire, a narrative tool, to inform clinical judgment, to reinforce professional behavior, and to afford a means of professional identity.

**Methods**

- This is an IRB approved (‘Exempt status’) cross-sectional survey of approximately 3000 SPA members.
- Following SPA research committee approval, the survey was emailed to the SPA membership listserv with one reminder, and responses were collected using Survey Monkey.
- SPA members were asked to share up to 3 “pearls” of wisdom that they have found useful in training, or other learners.
- Participants were given the option of attribution or to remain anonymous.
- Individual aphorisms were then categorized into 17 topic categories.

**Results**

- 236 members responded to the survey, a response rate of about 8%.
- 91.5% of respondents worked in a teaching role for medical students, residents, or other learners.
- 54% of the respondents had > 15 years of experience in practice (11-15yrs -10%; 6-10yrs -15%; 3-5yrs -10%; <2yrs – 11%).
- 65% of respondents preferred to remain anonymous while 35% requested attribution.
- 221 respondents (94%) contributed at least one aphorism, while 174 (79%) contributed at least two, 120 (54%) contributed at least three, and 14 (6%) contributed four or more aphorisms.
- A total of 523 aphorisms were collected. They were subjectively categorized into 17 topic categories.

**‘Pearls’ or Aphorisms**

- The seven most common categories and some examples from each are tabulated here:

**Compilation**

- **General**
  - Good hands always connect with good time to induce
  - IV is the patient’s life line
  - The only thing worse than no preoxygenation is too much

- **Safety**
  - Don’t leave the patient first; then the parents
  - The patient is not the bed to the parents

- **Planning/Preparation**
  - The saphenous vein is a great blind stick to practice on so you are ready in an emergency to access
  - It has never hurt to take more fluids than your pediatric patient needs.

- **Medication Dosing**
  - The IV is the patient’s life line
  - Premature extubation of neonates (31 responses)

- **Breathing**
  - If you don’t have plan B, then cancel plan A
  - The only thing worse than no preoxygenation is too much

- **Hypotension**
  - Hypotension is hypovolemia
  - Hypo tension is hypovolemia

- **Ventricles**
  - Two ventricles are better than one
  - Cardiac output is the product of heart rate and stroke volume

- **Disturbances**
  - You can’t pump what you can’t measure
  - Disturbances
  - Withdrawing intubation

- **Surveillance**
  - Hypotension
  - Get an ETT in until it is no longer needed

- **Cricothyrotomy**
  - The only way to do intubation is to do it

- **Deviations**
  - If someone says this is the only way to do it, they’re probably wrong

- **Pediatric**
  - Babies are little vagal bundles of water
  - The IV is the patient’s life line

- **Surgical**
  - IV
  - CPAP is your friend during pediatric induction

- **Intravenous**
  - The only thing worse than no preoxygenation is too much
  - If you don’t have plan B, then cancel plan A

- **Anesthesia**
  - You can never go back in time and turn off the agent sooner. You can always turn it back on

- **Psychosocial**
  - It has never hurt to take more fluids than your pediatric patient needs.

- **Technical**
  - The only thing worse than no preoxygenation is too much

- **Educational**
  - The saphenous vein is a great blind stick to practice on so you are ready in an emergency to access

**Limitations**

- **Response rate** is low (8%) compared to the number of SPA members.
- **Trainees** become teachers, so pearls are passed down to successive waves of trainees, resulting in repetition.
- **Aphorisms** claim generalisability, but logically one aphorism cannot be true if contradicted in another statement.

**Conclusion**

- **Aphorisms** are an engaging and easily remembered way of imparting knowledge or experiential clinical tips.
- **Many aphorisms** are not supported by evidence per se, but are useful as a colorful aide-memoire and to inform clinical practice in an easily remembered and humorous way.

**References**