



Efficacy of Wallet Cards and Letters in Sharing Difficult Airway Information to Patients and Providers



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BACKGROUND:

- Unexpected airway difficulty continues to be a potential cause for significant morbidity and mortality for patients
- Anesthetists and anesthesiologists are faced with this issue on a regular basis; the estimated prevalence of patients who have difficult airways varies from 0.1% to 10.1%¹
- There is potential for communication about airway difficulty to reduce future airway complications²
- Providers feel that there needs to be more communication between specialists about patients' airways, although there are often limited systems in place to facilitate this³

STUDY AIMS:

- The purpose of this study is to determine whether wallet cards and letters sent postoperatively are effective in communicating difficult airway information to patients, primary care doctors (PCPs), and proceduralists.

METHODOLOGY:

- 172 patients were emailed a difficult airway letter or wallet card for a difficult intubation at UCH from 8/15/16 to 8/07/18
- All patients were contacted through an email or phone survey
- Survey included a series of questions regarding whether they were notified they had a difficult airway and received a wallet and letter card, if they had shown this card to their PCP and futureproceduralists, and if they had registered with the MedicAlert system.

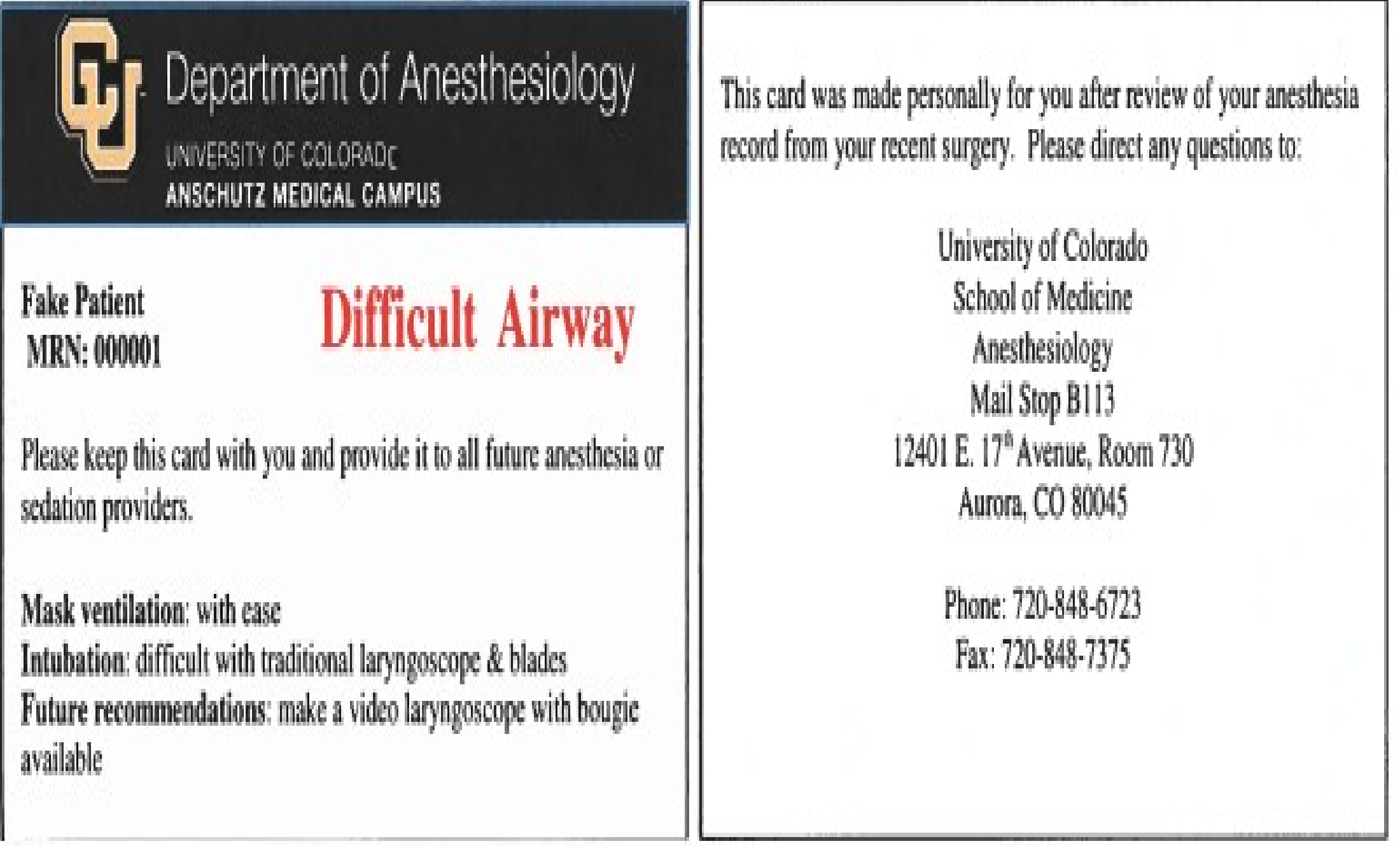


Figure 1: Example Airway Wallet Card

Figure 2: Example Airway Letter

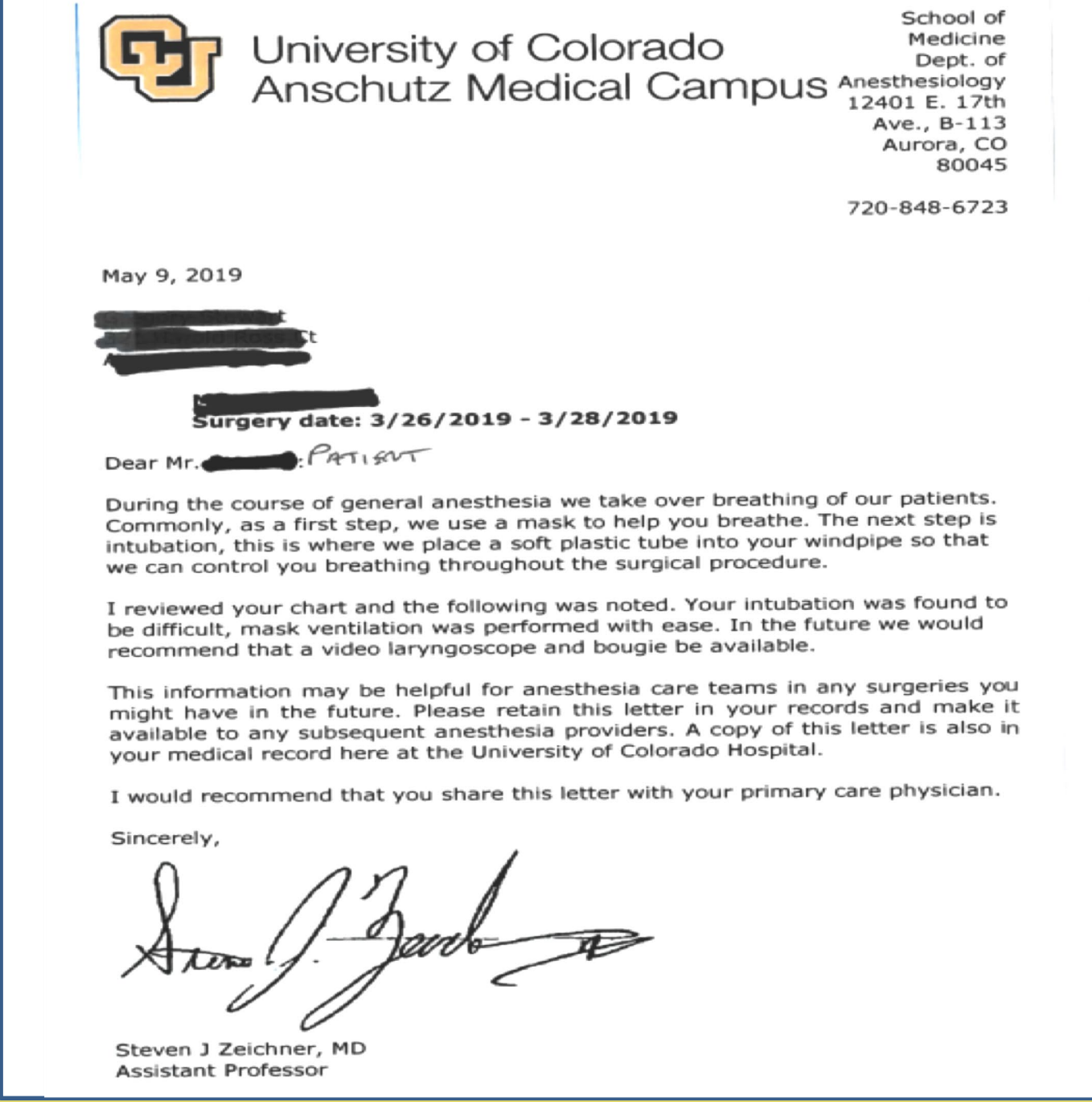


Table 1: Phone/Email Survey Results

Survey Question	Number who responded "yes" (N)	% of responders
Informed while in hospital?	46	76.7%
Received a wallet card and letter in mail?	45	75.0%
Understand what is on them?	41	91.1%
Carry wallet card with them?	34	75.5%
Shown to a health care provider?	17	50.0%
Discussed with PCP?	27	45.0%
Shown wallet card or letter to PCP?	16	59.3%
Additional surgeries?	27	45.0%
Discussed difficult airway?	24	88.9%
Showed wallet card/letter to proceduralist?	12	44.4%
Part of MedicAlert System?	2	3.3%

RESULTS:

- 60 patients responded to the survey (either by phone or email) (34.9% of all patients)
- About one fourth of patients do not recall being informed they had a difficult airway postoperatively while in the hospital
- About one fourth of patients do not recall receiving a wallet card and/or letter in the mail even though they were sent both
- Three fourths of patients carry the wallet card but only half of those patients have shown it to a health care provider
- Less than half of patients have discussed their difficult airway with their PCP
- A large majority of patients have discussed their difficult airway with an anesthesiologist or surgeon before a subsequent procedure, but less than half actually showed their wallet card or letter
- Only 2 people were registered for the MedicAlert System

DISCUSSION:

- A large percentage of patients are still uninformed about their difficult airway
- This poses a risk for similar airway difficulties in future surgeries
- Further instruction about who to communicate and share this airway information with (such as PCPs) is required
- We should be encouraging patients to register for the MedicAlert System, a potentially life saving measure

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

- Possible future studies include:
- To see whether letters/wallet cards have decreased airway complication rates in patients who have had subsequent surgeries
- When is the best time to inform a patient about his/her difficult airway to ensure they understand this information
- The number of PCPs who have forwarded airway information to anesthesiologists and/or surgeons
- Other interventions to increase comprehension and sharing of difficult airway information (including phone calls, post-op clinic visits, etc)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

- o No conflicts of interest to disclose

REFERENCES:

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