



### Accidents Can Happen

*In many years of driving, I have traveled more than twice the distance to the moon. Except for a few scratches, those miles were accident free until relatively recently. I was trying cautiously to cross a busy intersection when I collided with another automobile. The damage to my car was upsetting, but not nearly as upsetting as the damage to my long-time accident-free record. I had always believed that I was a safe driver and that my accident-free record was due to those safe driving practices. Quite unexpectedly, my record changed. An accident had happened.*

*At a recent meeting we sat together and discussed his practice. This busy practitioner thought that he had been a conscientious dentist, and had never had any serious problems in his practice. He successfully used sedation with many of his young patients for many years. He continued to use a fixed dose of chloral hydrate administered in the patient's home prior to the dental visit. When I questioned him about following sedation guidelines, he responded that in spite of those guidelines, he would continue his usual practice. After many hundreds of sedations with no problems, he did not intend to change his procedures. He did not consider that an accident could happen.*

*It was not long ago that a lawyer asked me to comment about the death of a child following the use of sedation for dental treatment. The young child had been receiving extensive restorative treatment, and conscious sedation was used to manage uncontrollable behavior. The lawyer asked if the dentist had followed appropriate standards of care.*

*Details of the case indicated that the child had been given a fixed dose of a drug that exceeded the maximum recommended dosage level. The child was not monitored properly throughout the procedure and when danger signs developed, they were not apparent to the practitioner who was busily involved with the difficult restorative procedure. When the practitioner finally did notice that the child had stopped breathing, he reacted in panic and did not institute appropriate procedures that could have saved the child. This practitioner had been comfortable using procedures he had used for many years without any apparent mishap. Those procedures violated the Academy's guidelines for the use of sedation, but he had encountered no evident complications until this tragic outcome. The drug had been administered in an inappropriate fashion, monitoring was inadequate, and the practitioner was not prepared to institute appropriate emergency procedures. This combination of events led to an irreversible outcome.*

*Accidents are events that occur unexpectedly, by chance, often with unknown cause. Accidents can also result from carelessness or ignorance of proper procedure. While accidents cannot be totally prevented, the chance of an irreversible outcome following sedation becomes more remote when the Academy's guidelines for the use of sedation are observed. As practitioners, we cannot be complacent. Our responsibility is to follow the sedation guidelines so that the children we serve will be protected during treatment.*