At the opening ceremony of the last European anaesthesia Meeting, the Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology was launched jointly by the European Society of Anaesthesiology (ESA) and the European Board of Anaesthesiology (EBA). This Declaration is an important milestone in patient safety and a major achievement for both the scientific and the political body. They joined their efforts in the interest of patients submitted to anaesthesia. They must be congratulated for this initiative and their commitment to this cause.

The Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology highlights the long-standing interest of anaesthesiologists in patient safety. Belgian anaesthesiologists have been pioneers in this field. On several occasions, the Society of Anaesthesia and Resuscitation of Belgium (SARB), as well as other Belgian scientific or professional bodies took, the initiative to publish articles aimed at improving patient safety (1-3). We must keep on with these efforts.

Anaesthesiologists have a major role in safeguarding the patient’s interest. As professionals, we must be aware of that role. We must let it be known that we are ready to take such responsibilities, even if they are shared with others, including politicians, health authorities, hospital executives, the health care industry and, last but not least, patients themselves.

In agreement with the ESA, the EBA and the European Journal of Anaesthesiology, the Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology is published in this issue of the Acta Anaesthesiologica Belgica.

This declaration “represents a shared European view of what is worthy achievable and necessary to improve patient’s safety in anaesthesia in 2010” (4). The Declaration recommends “practical steps” that all anaesthetists can successfully include in their practice (4).

It may be that after reading this declaration, you conclude that you and your department meet the standards set in it. If so, Congratulations!

If this is not the case, this Declaration may help you to obtain resources needed to deliver a higher standard of care.

Anyway, in an age of cost containment and in this era of increasing regulation of medical practice by external bodies, it is important that we, anaesthesiologists, aim to improve our practice by ourselves rather than simply comply with externally imposed and defined standards.

References