

Allied Health

Anesthesiologist Assistant

The anesthesiologist assistant (AA) is a skilled person qualified by advanced academic and clinical education to provide anesthetic care under the direction of a qualified anesthesiologist. The anesthesiologist, who is responsible for the AA is available to prescribe and direct particular therapeutic interventions in the operating room and the intensive care setting.

By virtue of the basic science education and clinical practice experience, the AA is skilled in the use of contemporary state-of-the-art patient monitoring techniques in anesthesia care environments. The AA performs complementary and supplementary anesthetic care and monitoring tasks, allowing the directing anesthesiologist to more efficiently and effectively use his or her own skills.

The anesthesiologist assistant is prepared to gather patient data, to assist in the evaluation of patients' physical and mental status, to record the surgical procedures planned, and to help the directing anesthesiologist administer the therapeutic plan that has been formulated for the anesthetic care of the patient. The tasks performed by AAs reflect regional variations in anesthesia practice and state regulatory factors.

Under the direction of the supervising anesthesiologist, in agreement with the guidelines established by the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) statement on the Anesthesia Care Team (ACT), and in accordance with the American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA) statement on the ACT, the anesthesiologist assistant's functions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Obtain an appropriate and accurate preanesthetic health history, perform an appropriate physical examination, and record pertinent data in an organized and legible manner;
- Conduct diagnostic laboratory and related studies as appropriate, such as drawing arterial and venous blood samples;
- Establish noninvasive and invasive routine monitoring modalities, as delegated by the supervising anesthesiologist;
- Administer induction agents, maintain and alter anesthesia levels, administer adjunctive treatment, and provide continuity of anesthetic care into and during the post-operative recovery period;
- Apply and interpret advanced monitoring techniques, such as pulmonary artery catheterization, electroencephalographic spectral analysis, echocardiography, and evoked potentials;
- Use advanced life support techniques, such as high frequency ventilation and intra-arterial cardiovascular assist devices;
- Make post-anesthesia patient rounds by recording patient progress notes, compiling and recording case summaries, and by transcribing standing and specific orders;
- Evaluate and treat life-threatening situations, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, on the basis of established protocols (BLS, ACLS, and PALS);
- Perform duties in intensive care units, pain clinics, and other settings, as appropriate;

- Train and supervise personnel in the calibration, trouble shooting, and use of patient monitors;
- Delegate administrative duties in an anesthesiology practice or anesthesiology department in such functions as the management of personnel, supplies and devices;
- Participate in the clinical instruction of others; and
- Perform and monitor regional anesthesia to include, but not limited to, spinal, epidural, IV regional, and other special techniques such as local infiltration and nerve blocks.

The AA may also be used in pain clinics or may participate in administrative and educational activities.



History

Anesthesiologist assistant educational programs began in 1969 at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio, and at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Beginning with the National Academy of Sciences' original description of the physician assistant role in both general and specialty areas of medicine, these programs were created in response to task-analysis studies, which showed the increasing need for anesthetists with technical backgrounds. The functional relationship of graduates to the anesthesiologist is similar to that of physician assistants to the general medical as well as surgical specialties.

In 1975, the ASA took action in support of this new emerging profession on the basis of its review of the educational and clinical objectives. In 1976, the ASA petitioned the AMA Council on Medical Education (CME) for recognition of the anesthesiologist assistant as an emerging health profession. The CME's recognition followed in 1978.

In 1987, standards for the education of the AA were adopted by the AMA, and programs at Emory University and Case Western University were evaluated and initially accredited by the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA) in 1988.



Career Description

In addition to the duties described in the occupational description above, anesthesiologist assistants provide other support according to established protocols. Such activities may include pretesting anesthesia delivery systems and patient monitors and operating special monitors and support devices for critical cardiac, pulmonary, and neurological systems. AAs may be involved in the operation of bedside electronic computer-based monitors and have supervisory responsibilities for laboratory functions associated with anesthesia and operating room care. They provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation in association with other anesthesia care team members, and in accordance with approved emergency protocols.



Employment Characteristics

Anesthesiologist assistants work as members of the anesthesia care team in any locale where they may be appropriately directed by legally responsible

anesthesiologists. The AAs most often work within organizations that also employ nurse anesthetists, and their responsibilities are identical. Experience to-date has been that AAs are most commonly employed in larger facilities that perform procedures such as cardiac surgery, neurosurgery, transplant surgery, and trauma care, given the training in extensive patient monitoring devices and complex patients and procedures, which are emphasized in AA educational programs. However, AAs are used in hospitals of all sizes and assist anesthesiologists in a variety of settings and for a wide range of procedures.



Salary

Starting salaries for 2006 graduates are \$95,000 up to \$120,000 for the 40-hour work week plus benefits and consideration of on-call activity. The high end of the salary range is around \$160,000 to \$180,000 for experienced anesthesiologists (including overtime). For more information, go to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. These post baccalaureate programs are typically 24 to 28 months.

Prerequisites. The programs require an undergraduate premedical background (premedical courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and math) and a baccalaureate degree. Although any baccalaureate major is acceptable (if premedical requirements are met), typical majors are biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science, or one of the allied health professions, such as respiratory therapy, medical technology, or nursing.



Certification

The National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants (NCCAA), which was founded in 1989, provides the certification process for AAs in the United States. The Commission includes anesthesiologists and anesthesiologist assistants. NCCAA contracts with the National Board of Medical Examiners to assist with the certification process, including task analyses, development of content grids, item writing and editing, and administration of examinations. The certification process incorporates a 6-year cycle of certifying examination, examination for continued demonstration of qualifications, and registration of continuing medical education.



Inquiries

Careers

Curriculum inquiries should be directed to the individual programs. Inquiries regarding AA careers should be directed to:

American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants
2209 Dickens Road
Richmond, VA 23230-2005
804 565-6353
866 328-5858 Toll-free
804 282-0090 Fax
E-mail: aaaa@societyhq.com
www.anesthetist.org

Certification

National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants
1500 Sunday Drive, Suite 102
Raleigh, NC 27607
919 573-5439
877 558-0411 Toll-free
919 573-5440 Fax
E-mail: business.office@aa-nccaa.org
www.aa-nccaa.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)
1361 Park Street, Clearwater, FL 33756
727 210-2350
727 210-2354 Fax
E-mail: mail@caahep.org
www.caahep.org
in collaboration with:
Accreditation Review Committee for the Anesthesiologist Assistant
Jennifer Anderson Warwick, Executive Director
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469 656-1103
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www.caahep.org/Committees-On-Accreditation/?ID=AA