

Anesthesiologist Assistant



Occupational Description

The anesthesiologist assistant (AA) functions as a specialty physician assistant under the direction of a licensed and qualified anesthesiologist, principally in medical centers. The AA assists the anesthesiologist in developing and implementing the anesthesia care plan. This may include collecting preoperative data, such as taking an appropriate health history; performing various preoperative tasks, such as the insertion of intravenous and arterial catheters and special catheters for central venous pressure monitoring, if necessary; performing airway management and drug administration for induction and maintenance of anesthesia; assisting in the administering and monitoring of regional and peripheral nerve blockade; administering supportive therapy, for example, with intravenous fluids and cardiovascular drugs; adjusting anesthetic levels on a minute-to-minute basis; performing intraoperative monitoring; providing recovery room care; and functioning in the intensive care unit. The AA may also be used in pain clinics or may participate in administrative and educational activities.



Job 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 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. Starting salaries are in the \$85,000 to \$95,000 range for the 40-hour work week plus benefits and consideration of on-call activity.



Educational Programs

Length. These postbaccalaureate programs are essentially 24 to 27 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), majors typically are biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science, or one of the allied health professions, such as respiratory therapy, medical technology, or nursing.



Licensure, Certification, and Registration

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
PO Box 13978
Tallahassee, FL 32317
866 328-5858
850 656-3038 Fax
www.anesthetist.org

Certification

National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants
PO Box 15519
Atlanta, GA 30333-0519
404 687-9978 Fax

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) in collaboration with:
Accreditation Review Committee for the Anesthesiologist Assistant
Jeff Smith
c/o CAAHEP
35 E Wacker Dr, #1970
Chicago, IL 60601
312 553-9355