What it’s like to specialize in anesthesiology: Shadowing Dr. Callas

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Staff News Writer

As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to specialize in anesthesiology? Meet AMA member Gerald R. Callas, MD, an anesthesiologist and a featured physician in the AMA’s “Shadow Me” Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties. Check out his insights to help determine whether a career in anesthesiology might be a good fit for you.

The AMA’s Specialty Guide simplifies medical students’ specialty selection process, highlights major specialties, details training information, and provides access to related association information. It is produced by FREIDA™, the AMA Residency & Fellowship Database®.

Learn more with the AMA about the medical specialty of anesthesiology.

Gerald R. Callas, MD
“Shadowing” Dr. Callas

Specialty: Anesthesiology.

Practice setting: Group.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/specialty-profiles/what-it-s-specialize-anesthesiology-shadowing-dr-callas

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Employment type: Private practice.

Years in practice: 18.

A typical day and week in my practice: A typical day consists of getting to the hospital by 6–6:30 a.m. to see my patients and to be ready to start in the operating room by 7:30 a.m. The day varies in length depending on where you are in the work schedule. A typical week for an anesthesiologist in our practice is taking more than two calls and working until the job gets done in the operating room on the other days.

The most challenging and rewarding aspects of anesthesiology: Not knowing the unexpected. A regular, easy operation can be made difficult just by the patient’s comorbidities. As anesthesiologists we must be ready for everything.

The most rewarding aspect of our career is saving someone’s life or just a simple thank you from the patient or their family.

How life in anesthesiology has been affected by the global pandemic: We have seen increased numbers of anesthesiologists getting COVID because we are airway specialists and are on the front line. Our specialty is stressful as is, but with COVID it makes it 100 times more stressful.

We deal with the stress through group discussions and a lot of support from our families and prayer.

Three adjectives to describe the typical anesthesiologist: Courageous, vigilant and dedicated.

How my lifestyle matches, or differs from, what I had envisioned: As an anesthesiologist, you have potential to have a work-life balance that is manageable. This specialty can allow shift work, part-time, full-time, or just about anything you are looking for. As related to medical school, the specialty is more rewarding than what I thought it would be in medical school.

Skills every physician in training should have for anesthesiology but won’t be tested for on the board exam: Their dedication and vigilance because a patient in the operating room can change on a dime. You must understand everything when you give an anesthetic.

One question physicians in training should ask themselves before pursuing anesthesiology: Are you committed and willing to sacrifice your personal time to learn as much as you can about the human body?

Books every medical student interested in anesthesiology should be reading: Miller’s Anesthesia, by Ronald D. Miller, MD, MS, et al. is the backbone of the specialty. When Breath Becomes Air, by Paul Kalanithi, MD, really puts life in perspective as a medical student and physician. Clinical Anesthesia, by Paul G. Barash, MD, et al. puts the anesthesia foundation into clinical
scenarios.

The online resource students interested in anesthesiology should follow: The American Society of Anesthesiologists and if you’re in Texas, the Texas Society of Anesthesiologists.

Mantra or song to describe life in anesthesiology: “Eye of the Tiger” by Survivor.