Anesthesiologist Assistants Are a Critical Component of the Patient Centered, Physician-Led Anesthesia Care Team

Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAs) are highly trained members of the Anesthesia Care Team who work directly under the supervision of a physician anesthesiologist to develop and implement anesthesia care plans. AAs function like specialized Physician Assistants (PA) for physician anesthesiologists. The AA profession has been in existence since 1971 and has maintained an impeccable safety record.

AAs Offer More Choice for Patients and Providers

AAs will offer another OPTION as an additional member of the Anesthesia Care Team. Not every patient’s case is the same, so it is beneficial for patients and their physicians to choose from a series of patient care models based on their situation. All of these patient care models should operate under physician leadership. The options include:

1. AAs practicing under anesthesiologists
2. NAs practicing under anesthesiologists
3. NAs practicing under other physician specialists

Anesthesiologist Assistant Work States

AAs Can Facilitate and Improve Overall Patient Care

With increasing demands on the healthcare system, we need to identify innovative ways to improve efficiency and increase access to care. AAs work under the direct supervision of a physician anesthesiologist and have many important responsibilities such as:

- Obtaining a patient’s health history
- Performing physical exams
- Administering medications
- Setting up external and internal monitors
- Implementing general and site-specific anesthetic techniques

AAs also provide continuity of anesthetic care during the post-operative recovery period and are trained to evaluate and treat life-threatening situations using advanced life support techniques.

By extending the physician’s reach, AAs allow physician anesthesiologists to focus where their medical training is needed most, on complex medical problems and emergencies.

Continued
Strong Education and Certification Requirements Prepare AAs for Medical Practice

While AAs and nurse anesthetists can be assigned the same care duties, the training and certification process for AAs differs.

- AAs must have a Masters Degree achieved through a graduate level training program that ranges from 24 to 29 months, includes 2,000-2,500 clinical hours, and certification in Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS).
- AA program-applicants must hold a four year Bachelor’s pre-medical degree and rank in the top percentiles on the MCAT GRE exams, the same requirements as a pre-medical track.
- AA programs must be based at, or in collaboration with, a university that has a medical school and academic anesthesiologist physician faculty, and each AA program must have at least one director that is a licensed, board-certified anesthesiologist.
- AAs must also pass an initial certification exam, pass a re-certification exam every six years and obtain 40 hours of Continuing Medical Education credits every two years.

“Trained specifically to share a common practice philosophy with anesthesiologists and to work only with anesthesiologists, AA education was designed to incorporate the basic principles supportive of the Anesthesia Care Team (ACT).”1

There are currently 10 accredited AA educational programs in the U.S.2

- Case Western Reserve University - Cleveland, Ohio
- Case Western Reserve University - Houston, Texas
- Case Western Reserve University - Washington, D.C.
- Emory University - Atlanta, Georgia
- Nova Southeastern University - Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- Nova Southeastern University - Tampa, Florida
- Quinnipiac University - Hamden, Connecticut
- South University - Savannah, Georgia
- University of Colorado - Aurora, Colorado
- University of Missouri - Kansas City, Missouri

Sources: