

Nurse Anesthetist

Job Description:

A nurse anesthetist is called a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA). A CRNA administers any number of agents (anesthesia) to either relieve pain or make patients unconscious for surgical procedures. Administration of anesthesia may be by intravenous (injected into the veins), inhalation, or spinal routes. During the administration of anesthesia, the CRNA closely monitors the patient's response by monitoring temperature, pulse, heart rate, and breathing rate. If any signs of an allergic reaction occur, immediate intervention is needed. During surgery, the CRNA continues to closely monitor the patient for symptoms of distress. This requires taking vital signs and watching for symptoms of shock, breathing problems, and heart irregularities. Patients are monitored until they have recovered from the anesthesia and are stable.

Prior to procedures that require anesthesia, the CRNA meets with the patient and family members to obtain pertinent information, explain the process, and answer any questions. CRNAs work in many practice settings including hospitals, obstetric delivery centers, dental clinics, plastic surgery clinics, and military facilities.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Assess the patient's medical history and how it might affect the patient's response to anesthesia.
- Assess the patient's pain management needs prior to surgery.
- Decide which drugs and techniques best fit the patient's needs.
- Educate the patient about the process to be used.
- Give local or general anesthesia as appropriate for the procedure.
- Monitor the patient's response during and after anesthesia.
- Initiate emergency measures as needed if the patient reacts badly to anesthesia.
- Keep detailed records of the medications given and the patient's response.
- Provide pain relief for women in labor.
- Assist in the resuscitation of critically ill or severely traumatized patients.
- Keep knowledgeable about new drugs and techniques as they become available.

Personal Qualities:

Nurse anesthetists must have good communication skills and the ability to instill confidence in patients. They must be interested in the chemistry of pharmaceuticals and have the stamina to focus for long periods of time.

Physical Requirements:

Nurse anesthetists are on their feet for long periods of time. They must be able to tolerate long and irregular work hours and are often required to work weekends or be on call.

Educational Requirements:

Prerequisites for a nurse anesthetist program are a Bachelor of Science degree, a license as a registered nurse (RN), and at least one year's work experience as a RN in an acute care nursing setting. A master's degree is awarded upon the successful completion of the nurse anesthetist program, which typically runs 24 to 36 months and includes both classroom and clinical experience.

Certification Requirements:

All states require the nurse anesthetist to pass a national certification examination. This certification is transferable from state to state.

Projected Outlook for this Career:

Nurse anesthetists have been providing anesthesia in the United States for over 100 years. The projected growth in this field is good because of the aging population and the increased need for surgical intervention and pain control.

Salary Information:

In 2004, the annual income for nurse anesthetists ranged from \$99,675 to \$117,771.

Career Ladders:

Nurse anesthetists start with nonurgent cases and primarily administer local anesthesia. With additional experience, CRNAs advance to more and more complicated cases.

To Learn More and Prepare:

- Obtain information from the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists.
- Explore the Web Links provided in this profile.
- Review professional journals such as Anesthesiology.
- Conduct an informational interview or job shadow a nurse anesthetist.
- Obtain employment or a volunteer position in a health care facility.
- Investigate scholarship and grant programs for students interested in nursing.
- In high school, takes classes in mathematics and science.
- Contact registered nursing and nurse anesthetist educational programs for information about their admission requirements and courses of study.
- Learn more about the licensing requirements of state(s) in which you might want to work.

Professional Organizations:

American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
222 South Prospect Avenue
Park Ridge, IL 60068
(847) 692-7050
<http://www.aana.com>

Web Links:

Anesthesia Nursing & Medicine
Provides a wide variety of information on anesthesia.
<http://www.anesthesia-nursing.com/>

CRNA Jobs
Contains job openings, state associations for nurse anesthetists, and many other informative links.
<http://www.crnajobs.com/>

University of Iowa Anesthesia Nursing
Click on "A-Z Search," then type "Nurse Anesthetist." Click on "Search" followed by "Anesthesia Nursing Home Page." Contains an example of a nurse anesthesia program, including course descriptions.
<http://www.uiowa.edu/>

American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Read news articles about, and of interest to, nurse anesthetists.
<http://www.aana.com>