

Physicians' Assistants (Anaesthesia)

Information for patients

Physicians' assistants (anaesthesia): information for patients

'Physicians' assistants (anaesthesia) are part of the multi-disciplinary anaesthesia team, led by a consultant anaesthetist, that looks after patients undergoing many aspects of critical care'

NHS Health Careers 2017 (bit.ly/2voQiAj)

Introduction

Physicians' assistants (anaesthesia) [PA(A)s] are trained healthcare professionals who are members of the multidisciplinary anaesthetic team in some hospitals. This leaflet explains who they are, how they are trained and where you may meet them in your hospital.

How are PA(A)s trained?

PA(A)s hold either a science degree or have training and experience as a healthcare professional. They then follow a two-year course to gain a national diploma in the practice of anaesthesia. During this time they are trained by consultant anaesthetists, who are fully qualified doctors with specialist training in anaesthesia. PA(A) training is mostly within a hospital. They work alongside consultant anaesthetists who continually support and assess them. The diploma is university-based and recognised by the Royal College of Anaesthetists.

How do PA(A)s contribute to the anaesthesia team?

This role has come about to help anaesthesia teams in hospitals work more flexibly.

The introduction into the NHS of the PA(A) role within the multidisciplinary anaesthesia team increases the workforce and can mean that in some hospitals more operations can be performed safely by allowing consultants to take responsibility for two patients at the same time. The consultant anaesthetist supervises the whole team, including PA(A)s, to ensure that the highest standards of care are maintained for all patients. PA(A)s can also help assess patients arriving for surgery at different times throughout the day so that delays are minimised. A voluntary register of trained PA(A)s is kept by the Royal College of Anaesthetists.

How is a PA(A) involved in my care?

PA(A)s always work under the close supervision of a consultant anaesthetist, who will be responsible for your anaesthesia care at all times.

Both the consultant anaesthetist and PA(A) will be with you at the start and at other significant times of your anaesthetic. The consultant will remain in the theatre suite. They will be supervising no more than two PA(A)s at any one time in different theatres, and will never be more than two minutes away.

You may meet a PA(A) at any stage of your anaesthetic care and they may:

- assess you before the operation to check your health and to discuss your care during and after your surgery. After discussing any choices with you, they will plan your anaesthetic care and agree this plan with the consultant anaesthetist who oversees and is responsible for your care

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- give your anaesthetic or sedation under the supervision of a consultant
- in some hospitals, experienced PA(A)s, after extra training and subject to local agreement, may also perform nerve blocks or other monitoring procedures for some operations
- assess you after the operation to make sure that you are recovering well
- provide resuscitation in case of emergency.

Where can I get more information?

You can read more information on the role of the PA(A) below:

- Association of Physicians' Assistants Anaesthesia (APAA) website: www.anaesthesiateam.com
- Royal College of Anaesthetists' website: bit.ly/2Hb1TV7
- Health Education England (2017) Medical Associate Professions: bit.ly/2EVbrSf

Additional resources

You can find more information leaflets on the College website www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo. The leaflets may also be available from the anaesthetic department or pre-assessment clinic in your hospital.

Risks associated with your anaesthetic

The following are leaflets about specific risks associated with having an anaesthetic or an anaesthetic procedure. They supplement the patient information leaflets listed above and are also available via the College website: www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo

- Feeling sick.
- Sore throat.
- Shivering.
- Damage to teeth, lips and tongue.
- Damage to the eye during general anaesthesia.
- Post-operative chest infection.
- Becoming confused after an operation.
- Accidental awareness during general anaesthesia.
- Serious allergy during an anaesthetic (anaphylaxis).
- Headache after a spinal or epidural injection.
- Nerve damage associated with having an operation under general anaesthetic.
- Nerve damage associated with a spinal or epidural injection.
- Nerve damage associated with peripheral nerve block.
- Equipment failure.
- Death or brain damage.



Royal College of Anaesthetists



Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you have any comments that you would like to make, please email them to patientinformation@rcoa.ac.uk

Royal College of Anaesthetists

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