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Anesthesiologists: Conquering Pain

Other than a pre-surgery consultation with an anesthesiologist, the only thing most patients remember post-surgery is the phrase “close your eyes and count backwards from one hundred.” “One hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight....zzzzzz.” The next thing you know, you’re being awakened by a nurse whose job it is to rouse you out of the deep sleep you’ve been experiencing. The anesthesia given usually produces a drug-induced amnesia, and surgery, for the most part, is made bearable.

Anesthesiologists are medical doctors who administer anesthetics during surgery or other medical procedures. Anesthesia (topical, local, regional or general) produces a loss of sensation, with or without loss of consciousness. Anesthesiologists examine a patient to determine the type of anesthesia needed and monitor the patient’s vital functions during surgery. They partner with other physicians to determine the patient’s condition before, during, and after the medical procedure. In other words, without the anesthesiologist, the Hollywood scene of taking a swig of whiskey and biting down on a bullet in order to bear the pain of surgery might be reality, not just fantasy.

Anesthesiologists may administer anesthesia directly or as part of an anesthesia team consisting of nurse anesthetists or anesthesiologist’s assistants. A nurse anesthetist, also called Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA), is a nurse who is trained in the administration of anesthesia after undergoing special training, usually 2–3 years after college, and who generally works under the supervision of a physician.

To become an anesthesiologist, a bachelor’s degree from an accredited four-year college or university must be earned, followed by a medical degree. After graduating medical school, a doctor will apply for a four-year residency with the option of further sub-specialization through a fellowship of one to three years. After graduating from the residency program, board certification can be achieved by successfully completing a complex written and oral examination process.

Many anesthesiologists work long, irregular hours. Acceptance to medical school is highly competitive and the eleven plus years it takes to be certified in the medical field is the most demanding of any occupation. Like

most health professionals, anesthesiologists are part of complicated, and often, life-threatening medical and surgical procedures. They are responsible for cardiac and pulmonary resuscitation, advanced life support, and stabilizing and preparing patients for emergency surgery.

The next time you put your health-care in the hands of an anesthesiologist, be thankful that the field has advanced past nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and ether, or better yet, a swig of whiskey and a leather strap clamped between your teeth. ●

Resources:

- Bls.gov
- American Society of Anesthesiologists
- American Board of Anesthesiology
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- <http://jobs.utah.gov/jsp/wi/utalmis/gotoOccinfo.do>
- Mshealthcarecareers.com



Utah Anesthesiologist Wages		Utah Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist Wages	
Median Hourly	\$56.26	Median Hourly	\$28.41
Mean Hourly	\$71.61	Mean Hourly	\$29.10
Mean Annual	\$148,900	Mean Annual	\$60,530

May, 2010 data, Bureau of Labor Statistics.