

Anesthesia Technologists: The Time Is Now

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Several years ago, Victoria Reyes was a high-functioning certified anesthesia technician working under the department leadership of Dr. Narendra Trivedi, CSA Immediate Past President, at Kaiser Permanente (KP) Baldwin Park, where the concept of training technicians to the level of an allied health professional was regularly promoted. Dr. Trivedi understood the importance of competent technicians serving as members of the anesthesia care team (ACT), given the ever-growing complexity of computerized monitoring and the highly technical equipment now standard for many anesthetics. The regional chiefs of anesthesia of Southern California Permanente Medical Group sought more certified anesthesia technicians like Ms. Reyes, but, realizing the paucity of training programs within the United States, developed their own program.

Michael Boytim, CRNA, Ed.D., assistant director of the Kaiser Permanente School of Anesthesia, took on the project of creating a KP Anesthesia Technician/Technologist Program. He began by partnering the KP School of Anesthesia with Pasadena City College (PCC), with the result that PCC students would receive an Associate of Science (AS) degree *and* a Certificate of Achievement in Anesthesia Technology upon completion of the program. I was selected to serve as the physician advisor to this new program and have worked with Michael Boytim and Victoria Reyes, who, as an anesthesia technologist certified by the American Society of Anesthesia Technologists and Technicians (ASATT), now is a full-time faculty member of the KP Anesthesia Technician/Technologist Program.

One might ask, why was there a need for an anesthesia technician/technologist program? Three recurrent issues had fueled the need:

- It was difficult to hire quality anesthesia technicians.
- It was hard to find consistently trained existing technicians.
- It had become increasingly challenging to find technicians who possessed the expertise and training to deal with complex computerized monitoring and highly technical anesthesia equipment.

Currently, core-trained anesthesia technicians are certified by ASATT, which also offers certification as an anesthesia technologist, a higher level that requires additional amounts of training and experience.

As anesthesia technicians and technologists become increasingly involved with our patients, it is helpful to understand the differences between their education/training/delivery levels according to ASATT.

Anesthesia Technologists (cont'd)

Anesthesia Technicians:

- Function as support personnel by maintaining anesthesia carts and anesthesia work-room equipment and performing anesthesia turnover.
- Have knowledge of anesthesia and monitoring equipment with some ability to troubleshoot equipment issues.
- Have Basic Life Support training.
- Generally enter practice through on-the-job-training (OJT).
- Are eligible to take the ASATT certification exam after two years of experience working within the anesthesia department.

Anesthesia Technologists:

- Function as an integral part of the ACT at an advanced level.
- Support anesthesia providers with patient care.
- Have expertise in anesthesia equipment and can troubleshoot and provide first-line repair of anesthesia equipment.
- Have Advanced Cardiac Life Support and IV certification.
- Assist anesthesia providers before, during and after surgery and are trained to anticipate the needs of the anesthesia provider and the patient.
- May take the technologist exam with OJT if they are already certified technicians; however, by July 2015 the technology exam may be taken only after successful completion of formal education such as the KP/PCC program.
- Will graduate with an AS degree and must meet a minimum number of clinical hours of training.

During the current transition period toward increased formalization and training for this anesthesia technology role, there are two exams/levels of certification available: anesthesia technician and certified anesthesia technologist. Beginning July 15, 2015, only the certified anesthesia technologist exam will continue to be available. Technologists will need to graduate from an associate degree program in order to be eligible to take the exam. All existing certified technicians will be able to maintain their certification as long as they renew with the appropriate continuing education. New entrants will be technologists, as this will be the continuing standard. The goal of ASATT is for the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) to support anesthesia technology as a health care sciences discipline and therefore assist in establishing standards and formalized national educational programs through the community college network, based upon curriculum supplied by the ASATT. With the ASA's advice and support, the certified technologist will become an important contributor in enhancing the care, quality and efficacy of the ACT.

Seven students graduated from the KP/PCC program in June 2011, and the next class has begun with more than twice that number. The training sites include KP Southern California Medical Centers as well as University of California, Irvine, and Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. Anesthesia practitioners at all levels should look forward to welcoming the certified technicians/technologists as integral members of the ACT.