Professional Definition

Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants (CAAs) are highly skilled health professionals who work under the delegation of licensed physician Anesthesiologists to implement anesthesia care plans. CAAs work exclusively within the Anesthesia Care Team model, as described by the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA). The goal of CAA education is to guide the transformation of qualified pre-medical student applicants with conferred bachelor degrees into competent, masters level degree, health care practitioners who aspire to work in the Anesthesia Care Team for the benefit of patients.

All CAAs must complete a comprehensive didactic and clinical program at the **graduate school level**. To be admitted into a CAA training program, students must have earned a baccalaureate degree with premedical coursework. CAAs are trained extensively in the delivery and maintenance of quality anesthesia care as well as advanced patient monitoring techniques. CAAs perform such tasks as administering drugs, obtaining vascular access, applying and interpreting monitors, establishing and maintaining a patient's airway, and preoperative assessment. CAAs train and work under the supervision of physician Anesthesiologists who retain responsibility for the immediate care of the patient. The care team model expands the medical treatment provided by the physician Anesthesiologist and equips the medical facility to serve patients more effectively and efficiently by increasing access to care.

History

In the early 1960s, leaders in the medical specialty of Anesthesiology recognized the existence of staffing shortages. To meet growing demands and to accommodate the increasing complexity of anesthesia and surgery, three Anesthesiologists (Drs. Gravenstein, Steinhaus, and Volpitto) proposed the concept of an "anesthesia technologist" who would be a member of the anesthesia team and would be considered an "applied physiologist." This was the precursor to what is now the Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant. The physicians designed an educational program whereby students would build on undergraduate premedical training then earn a Master's degree in Anesthesiology. The concept became a reality in 1969 when the first CAA training program began accepting students at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, followed shortly thereafter by a program at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1989, the National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants (NCCAA) was established to create a national certification process. Since 2002, there has been a significant expansion of CAA education programs in the US. Today, the ASA fully supports Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants and the expansion of CAA licensure and practice across the nation.

Scope of Practice

The scope of CAA clinical practice is identical to that of nurse anesthetists on the Anesthesia Care Team.
The local scope of practice of CAAs is usually defined by the following:

- The medically supervising and delegating physican Anesthesiologist or their medical practice group
- The hospital credentialing body
- The state board of medicine
- Any applicable state statute or regulation.

Practice Locations

Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants enjoy career pathways in a dynamic profession that continues to realize exponential growth, as evidenced by the addition of new training sites and new states opening to CAA practice. States, territories, and districts in which CAAs work by license, regulation, and/or certification:

- Alabama
- Colorado
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Indiana
- Kentucky
- Missouri
- New Mexico
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- Utah
- Vermont
- Wisconsin
- US Territory Guam

States in which CAAs are granted practice privilege through physician delegation:

- Kansas
- Michigan
- Pennsylvania
- Texas

If a state does not presently provide the legislative or delegatory option of CAA practice, consultation should take place with the state board of medicine or other governing body to explore the specific legal implications of CAA practice in your state. General information on the steps to establish CAA practice is available from the AAAA Director of State Affairs office (info@anesthetist.org) Additional information can be found at https://www.anesthetist.org/info

Recognized by Federal Government

CAAs may practice at any Veterans Affairs facility in all 50 states.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recognizes both Certified AAs and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) as non-physician anesthesia providers. Similarly, commercial insurance payers make no distinction between the two anesthetist types with regard to payments for services provided under medical direction by a physician Anesthesiologist.

Standard: Organization and Staffing

The organization of Anesthesia services must be appropriate to the scope of the services offered. Anesthesia must be administered only by the following providers:

- A qualified physician Anesthesiologist;
- A doctor of medicine or osteopathy (other than an Anesthesiologist);
- A dentist, oral surgeon, or podiatrist who is qualified to administer anesthesia under state law;
- A CRNA, as defined in § 410.69(b) of the Federal Register, "who is under the supervision of the operating practitioner or of an Anesthesiologist who is immediately available if needed"; or
- A CAA, as defined in § 410.69(b) of the Federal Register, "who is under the supervision of an Anesthesiologist who is immediately available if needed."