Commentary

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Development of Anesthesiology and its Related Matters, Including Resuscitation and Pain

Hines Stella*

Department of Environmental Medicine, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore , United states

***Corresponding author:** Hines Stella, Department of Environmental Medicine, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, United states, Tel: +12145896312; E-mail: hinesstella@gmail.com

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Introduction

Anesthesiology, also spelled anesthesiology, medical specialty dealing with anesthesia and related matters, including resuscitation and pain. The development of anesthesiology as a specialized field came about because of the dangers of anesthesia, which involves the use of carefully graduated doses of strong poisons to deaden pain. In the 19th century, anesthesia in the operating room, where the surgeon was in command, was relegated to a minor role. Yet gradually physicians and surgeons recognized the need for anesthesiologists, well-trained specialist physicians dedicated full-time to anesthesia, who could extend surgical horizons by permitting operations previously scarcely conceivable and by allowing applications of surgical principles to patients previously considered too ill to withstand either anesthesia or operation. A few physicians were attracted by this opportunity early in the 20th century, but it was not until the mid-1930s that the specialty was officially recognized with the establishment of such medical societies as the American Board of Anesthesiology for certifying appropriately trained physician anesthetists. Today, in virtually every medical school, anesthesiology functions either as an autonomous academic department or as a division of surgery. As a specialty, the core element of anesthesiology is the practice of anesthesia. This comprises the use of various injected and inhaled medications to produce a loss of sensation in patients, making it possible to carry out procedures that would otherwise cause intolerable pain or be technically unfeasible. Safe anesthesia requires in-depth knowledge of various invasive and non-invasive organ support techniques that are used to control patients' vital functions while under the effects of anesthetic drugs; these include advanced airway management, invasive and non-invasive hemodynamic monitors, and diagnostic techniques like ultrasonography and echocardiography. Anesthesiologists are expected to have expert knowledge of human physiology, medical physics, and pharmacology, as well as a broad general knowledge of all areas of medicine and surgery in all ages of patients, with a particular focus on those aspects which may impact on a surgical procedure. In recent decades, the role of anesthesiologists has broadened to focus not just on administering anesthetics during the surgical procedure itself, but also beforehand in order to identify high-risk patients and optimize their fitness, during the procedure to maintain situational awareness of the surgery itself so as to improve safety, as well as afterwards in order to promote and enhance recovery. This has been termed "Perioperative Medicine".

Physician anesthesiologists meet with you and your surgeon before surgery to assess your health and make decisions to ensure your anesthesia care is as safe and effective as possible. They monitor your vital signs during surgery, including how well your heart and lungs are working while you're unconscious, and they take care of you after surgery to make sure you're as comfortable as possible while you recover.

Physician anesthesiologists also play a key role in taking care of patients who are having minor surgery or who may not require general anesthesia, such as women in labor who need to be awake and alert but require effective pain management. They also help patients who have serious pain from an injury, or chronic or recurring pain such as migraines or ongoing back problems. By the mid-20th century anesthesia had more or less evolved into what we deem acceptable today. Contemporary general anesthesia focusses on what may be referred to as the 6 A's. These are, in random order, anxiolytics, areflexia, autonomic areflexia, analgesia, amnesia and anesthesia. Anxiolytics is concerned with the control of anxiousness, whereas areflexi and autonomic areflexi focus on the loss of reflexes and the control of the sympathetic nervous system reflexes, respectively. Analgesia is for the control of pain, while amnesia is the loss of memory recall and anesthesia is the loss of sensation with or without conscious thought.