

Not Just Pain Relief

ANESTHESIOLOGY TEAM SUPPORTS PATIENTS BEFORE, DURING, AFTER SURGERY

They've been called "pain docs." Perhaps "sleep docs." To be accurate, however, anesthesiologists should be called "all-round docs."

Anesthesiologists are physicians who have graduated from medical school and completed an approved residency in anesthesiology. Not only do they control pain and suppress

consciousness, but at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, they and other members of the anesthesiology team also care for surgical patients before, during, and after surgery.

The anesthesiologist is the physician who provides all-round medical care to patients throughout their surgical experiences. This all-round approach includes medically evaluating a



patient before surgery, consulting with the surgical team, providing pain control and supporting life functions during surgery, supervising care after surgery, and medically discharging the patient from the recovery unit.

“Anesthesiologists play a vital role in assessing a patient’s medical readiness for surgery,” says Jerry Epps, MD and associate professor and chair of the Department of Anesthesiology. “They are unique in their advanced knowledge of the medical illnesses that a patient undergoing surgery may suffer, as well as the effects on the body of the specific operation to be performed.”

In the operating room, these doctors are responsible for the medical management and anesthetic care of patients throughout surgery. The anesthesiologist must carefully match the anesthetic needs of each patient to the patient’s medical condition and responses to anesthesia and to the requirements of the surgery, and must monitor life functions including the heart rate, blood pressure, heart rhythm, body temperature, and breathing.

In many surgical settings at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, anesthesiologists work in the “anesthesia care team” mode, bringing together the expertise of the anesthesiologist, certified nurse anesthetists, anesthesiology resident physicians, and others. “This team approach is known to be safer and helps ensure more successful results than one anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist working alone,” Epps says.

After surgery, patients are transferred to a recovery/post anesthesia care unit, where they continue to emerge from the effects of anesthesia under the care of the perianesthesia nurse and anesthesiologist. The evidence of recovery –

including activity level, adequacy of breathing, circulation, level of consciousness, and oxygen saturation – is continuously monitored, and pain control is optimized. In most cases, the anesthesiologist, in conjunction with the surgeon, decides when the patient has recovered enough to be sent home following outpatient surgery or has been stabilized sufficiently to be moved to a regular room or another unit.

In an intensive care unit, the anesthesiologist is uniquely qualified to direct the complete medical care of these very sick patients. Here he or she provides medical assessment and diagnosis, respiratory and cardiovascular support, and infection control.

“Our highly trained anesthesiologists also possess the knowledge to deal with many emergency and trauma situations,” says Epps, “and they care for patients undergoing radiological imaging, gastrointestinal endoscopy, placement and testing of cardiac pacemakers and defibrillators, and other nonsurgical procedures.”

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Not only do the anesthesiologists at the medical center oversee pain management during surgery, they also provide pain control during other trying experiences in our lives, like chronic illness or cancer treatment, and during the most joyous experiences, such as the birth of a child.

When pain management is called for, expertise is expected and delivered. And the same highly skilled physician who provides that pain management also directs medical care, before, during and after surgery and in other medical situations.

Anesthesiologists are indeed our all-round physicians.

Amanda E. Johnson

The team approach to anesthesiology is successful. Members of an anesthesiology team include (clockwise from top) Jerry Epps, MD, associate professor, chair, Department of Anesthesiology; Jonathan DiRuzzo, MD, chief, third-year anesthesiology resident physician; Jim Jones, chief, CRNA; Brigitte Messenger, MD, second-year anesthesiology resident physician; Kari Clinton, SRNA.