Your future in anaesthesia
The Royal College of Anaesthetists is the professional organisation responsible for the specialty of anaesthesia throughout the UK, and represents 21,000 doctors. We ensure the quality of patient care through the maintenance of standards in anaesthesia, critical care and pain medicine. Throughout this brochure we aim to inform and interest you in a career in medicine, especially in the specialty of anaesthesia.

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Who should read this?

This brochure is for students who may have already considered a career in medicine – even if not specifically in anaesthesia. This brochure will also appeal to those who would like to know more about the basics of anaesthesia and the specialty as a career choice.
What is an anaesthetist?
Anaesthetists are specialist doctors responsible for providing anaesthesia and pain management to patients before, during and after operations and surgical procedures. We form the largest single hospital specialty and our skills are used in all aspects of patient care. Anaesthetists have always been very closely involved in patient care at the time of surgery. However, now more than ever, we are taking a perioperative approach to surgery and medicine, meaning that we are increasingly involved in patient care before, during and after the operation itself.

What is the role of an anaesthetist?
The role of an anaesthetist goes beyond providing anaesthesia to our patients. We are involved with many aspects of surgery, in and out of the hospital. Many anaesthetists also specialise in pain medicine, treating patients with long-term and acute pain, or receive dual training in intensive care medicine. An anaesthetist’s responsibilities include:

- working closely with the patient’s surgical team
- conducting routine checks and preparing patients for surgery
- ensuring that the correct anaesthesia is provided to the patient before and during surgery
- remaining with the patient throughout surgery to monitor their well-being (including their heart rate, blood pressure and consciousness)
- providing pain relief during labour and obstetric anaesthesia
- helping to transport very ill and injured patients
- being involved in resuscitation of some of the most unwell patients and trauma patients
- being responsible for patients after surgery.

Why should I consider a career in medicine, especially anaesthesia?
A career in medicine, especially in anaesthesia, has many advantages: you will be helping people of all ages and with different medical conditions, and will constantly be making a positive difference to their lives.

You will also be working within the NHS, one of the largest and most respected employers in the world. There are also great opportunities to develop your skills and travel abroad, whether to teach, to train or for gaining relevant experience. Many of our trainees have gained valuable skills and experience in Australia, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Singapore and South Africa, before returning to the UK to put those skills to work.

Unlike many other medical specialties, as an anaesthetist you will be caring for your patient before, during and after their surgical journey. Your skills will also be in high demand nationally and globally: let’s face it, as long as there are humans, we will need doctors and anaesthetists.
Non-technical skills required

Throughout your medical school journey and anaesthetics training programme, you will be developing your technical skills to become an effective anaesthetist. However, non-technical skills are just as important to a successful career in medicine and anaesthesia. You can start working on these important skills now to aid your success in your medical profession.

**Communication** – Good communication skills are important as you will need to work effectively on a daily basis with many different patients, patients’ relatives, other anaesthetists and members of hospital staff.

**Team work** – As an anaesthetist, you are an integral part of the surgical team. Being a strong team player will benefit the patient and help ensure the operation is as successful as possible.

**Confidence** – This ties in with being trustworthy. If you display confidence in your job and your tasks, patients will feel more at ease and will trust you more. Think about how much better you feel when you can trust someone, especially if they were helping you through surgery.

**Decision making** – Being able to make the right decision for your patients and yourself is key to maintaining patient safety. You will need to make considered decisions, sometimes in a high pressure environment.

**Commitment** – A career in medicine, especially anaesthesia, requires great commitment, in particular to learning, training and working at a high level. This is to ensure you can complete your training programme and become a registered doctor.

**Trustworthy** – Patients are going to be trusting you with their lives. A successful anaesthetist is both trustworthy and honest.

**Situation awareness** – It is crucial to be aware of what is happening around you at all times. The main reason for this is patient safety – heightened awareness should lead to fewer preventable errors.

**Decision making** – Being able to make the right decision for your patients and yourself is key to maintaining patient safety. You will need to make considered decisions, sometimes in a high pressure environment.

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**Task management** – The effective management of your tasks will increase your efficiency, help your schedule and make your days run smoothly. You will need to prioritise on a day-to-day basis and will often be handling more than one situation at a time.

**Attention to detail** – This is an important skill to develop. Paying attention to the situation and your surroundings at all times will greatly benefit you and the patient. It will enable you to remain in control of any situation and will leave less room for errors.

**Work well under pressure** – Surgery can be stressful and sometimes does not go to plan. You will need to remain calm and productive and to work well with the rest of the surgical team, no matter what problems you are faced with.
School-leaver requirements for medical school

To pursue a career in medicine and anaesthesia, you will need to attend medical school following your A-Levels. The application process for medical school can be extremely competitive so it is important to plan ahead and be proactive. Requirements for medical schools can differ from school to school, but there are some general requirements including:

- medical school applicants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to have good GCSEs (A and A* grades) especially in science, maths and English. B grades are sometimes acceptable; however this depends on the particular medical school that you are applying for.
- medical schools will look for applicants with good grades at A Level/Highers in chemistry and often in biology. Another related subject such as physics or maths is often essential.
- if you achieve good grades in non-science A Levels or Highers, do not worry. You will usually be required to study a year-long foundation course in medical school to compensate for this. For clarification on this you can visit www.medschools.ac.uk and contact your chosen medical school directly.
- work experience and extra-curricular activities can go a long way to help your application stand out. Not only will work experience in a medical field (or similar) give you a wider perspective, it will also help you to decide whether medicine is the right career for you.
- interviews, personal statements and even maths tests are also common within the medical school application process. As previously mentioned, each medical school will outline their specific requirements so do not be discouraged.

More information on medical schools and the application process can be found on the following websites: www.bma.org.uk and www.healthcareers.nhs.uk

Your route into medicine can vary depending on your educational background and where you are in life. Therefore, it is always important to research your choices and contact medical schools directly for clarification.
**Where can I find out more?**

We hope that you now have the information you need and are inspired to consider a career in anaesthesia. If you would like to find out more, the useful links below will help. We wish you all the best for your future career in medicine and look forward to hopefully welcoming you into the profession of anaesthesia.

- **Royal College of Anaesthetists**
  [www.rcoa.ac.uk](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk)

- **Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine**
  [www.ficm.ac.uk](http://www.ficm.ac.uk)

- **Faculty of Pain Medicine**
  [www.fpm.ac.uk](http://www.fpm.ac.uk)

- **Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland**
  [www.aagbi.org](http://www.aagbi.org)

- **UCAS (Undergraduate Courses at University and College)**
  [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

- **Medical Schools Council**
  [www.medschools.ac.uk](http://www.medschools.ac.uk)

- **British Medical Association**
  [www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)

- **RSM (Royal Society of Medicine)**
  [www.rsmuk.com](http://www.rsmuk.com)

- **Student BMJ (British Medical Journal)**
  [www.student.bmj.com](http://www.student.bmj.com)

- **MedSchools Online**
  [www.medschoolsonline.co.uk](http://www.medschoolsonline.co.uk)

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**Why did I choose a career in anaesthesia?**

“At medical school I never considered anaesthetics as a possible career choice. My perception was that the patients would all be ‘asleep’ and I would spend my days in theatre staring at numbers on a screen. My first day in anaesthetics made me realise how wrong I was, and changed my career path. In 12 hours, I performed my first medical procedure, helped keep an elderly woman calm during hip surgery and observed the intubation of a two-year old in A&E. My heart was pounding at a hundred miles an hour!

It was clear after that first day: I knew that I wanted to be an anaesthetist. This was everything I wanted in a job; the interaction with patients, the emergency management and the understanding of how everything in medicine works.”

- **Dr Nicole Martins**
  CT1 (Core Anaesthetic Trainee)
  Royal Sussex County Hospital
  Kent, Surrey and Sussex Deanery