

Q's and A's Concerning Anesthesiologist Assistants in Florida

1. Q: How are AAs in Florida regulated?

A: Anesthesiologist Assistants (AA's) are governed by Section 458.3475, Florida Statutes. AA practice is regulated by the Board of Medicine. The Board has established an AA Committee, which concentrates on AA licensing and rulemaking. An anesthesiologist who supervises an anesthesiologist assistant must be board certified or board eligible, qualified in the medical areas in which the anesthesiologist assistant performs, and is liable for the performance of the anesthesiologist assistant. An anesthesiologist or group of anesthesiologists must, upon establishing a supervisory relationship with an anesthesiologist assistant, file a written protocol with the Board of Medicine. Below are some of the common questions concerning AAs and their relationship with CRNAs.

2. Q: What can an AA do?

A. An AA can perform most anesthesia-related functions under the direct supervision of an anesthesiologist and in accordance with a protocol, **except** that an AA may only "assist" with epidurals and spinals. In 2015 the Board of Medicine rejected an attempt by AAs to read "assist" to mean the same as "perform," and denied a declaratory statement petition that would have allowed AAs to perform epidurals. An AA may assist an anesthesiologist in developing and implementing an anesthesia care plan for a patient. In providing assistance to an anesthesiologist, an AA may perform any of the following functions that are included in the AA's protocol while under the direct supervision of an anesthesiologist:

- Obtain a comprehensive patient history and present the history to the supervising anesthesiologist.
- Pretest and calibrate anesthesia delivery systems and monitor, obtain, and interpret information from the systems and monitors.
- Assist the supervising anesthesiologist with the implementation of medically accepted monitoring techniques.
- Establish basic and advanced airway interventions, including intubation of the trachea and performing ventilatory support.
- Administer intermittent vasoactive drugs and start and adjust vasoactive infusions.
- Administer anesthetic drugs, adjuvant drugs, and accessory drugs.
- Assist the supervising anesthesiologist with the performance of epidural anesthetic procedures and spinal anesthetic procedures.
- Administer blood, blood products, and supportive fluids.

- Support life functions during anesthesia health care, including induction and intubation procedures, the use of appropriate mechanical supportive devices, and the management of fluid, electrolyte, and blood component balances.
- Recognize and take appropriate corrective action for abnormal patient responses to anesthesia, adjunctive medication, or other forms of therapy.
- Participate in management of the patient while in the post-anesthesia recovery area, including the administration of any supporting fluids or drugs.
- Place special peripheral and central venous and arterial lines for blood sampling and monitoring as appropriate.

3. Q: What are the supervision requirements for an AA in Florida?

A: The law requires that licensed AAs be under the “direct supervision” of a board certified or board eligible anesthesiologist at all times while providing anesthesia services. “Direct supervision” is defined in the law as: **“the onsite, personal supervision by an anesthesiologist who is present in the office when the procedure is being performed in that office, or is present in the surgical or obstetrical suite when the procedure is being performed in that surgical or obstetrical suite and who is in all instances immediately available to provide assistance and direction to the anesthesiologist assistant while anesthesia services are being performed.”** Section 458.3475(1)(g), Florida Statutes. An anesthesiologist may not supervise more than four AAs at any one time.

4. Q: What are the supervision requirements for AA trainees?

A. The AA statute requires licensed AAs to be under the “direct supervision” of a board certified or board eligible anesthesiologist whenever they are involved in an anesthetic procedure. However, the law completely exempts unlicensed AA trainees from the requirements of the statutes governing AA practice, including the supervision requirement. Furthermore, the law expressly states that the supervising anesthesiologist is liable for the performance of the licensed AA. However, there is no similar provision in the law that makes the supervising anesthesiologist liable for the performance of an unlicensed AA trainee.

The Board of Nursing has issued a Declaratory Statement stating that CRNAs are not authorized to supervise unlicensed AA trainees (Final Order No. DOH-06-1351-DS-MQA).

5. Q: Under what title is an AA permitted to practice?

A: State law (Section 458.3475, Florida Statutes) requires an AA to “clearly convey to the patient that he or she is an anesthesiologist assistant.”

6. Q: Can a CRNA be relieved for a break/lunch by an AA?

A. AAs are licensed to perform medical services delegated and directly supervised by a supervising anesthesiologist. Nothing in the Nurse Practice Act or Section 458.3475, Florida Statutes permits a CRNA to delegate any nursing or medical services to an AA. CRNAs are expressly prohibited by a Board of Nursing rule from delegating or contracting for the performance of professional responsibilities by a person when the licensee delegating or

contracting for performance of such responsibilities knows, or has reason to know, such person is not qualified by training, experience, and authorization when required to perform them.

When circumstances dictate that a CRNA or SRNA will be relieved by an AA, the CRNA should be relieved by the AA's supervising anesthesiologist, who may then delegate to the AA at his/her discretion. In such case, the law is clear that the supervising anesthesiologist will be liable for any act or omission of an AA acting under the anesthesiologist's supervision and control.

Similarly, a CRNA or SRNA should not be relieved by an unlicensed AA trainee; but rather by the supervising anesthesiologist, who may then delegate to the AA trainee at his/her discretion.

7. Q: Can a CRNA relieve an AA?

A. Nothing in the Nurse Practice Act or Section 458.3475, Florida Statutes expressly prohibits a CRNA from relieving an AA. However, because the AA statute requires AAs to be under the "direct supervision" of an anesthesiologist whenever they are involved in an anesthetic procedure, the decision to relieve an AA must be made by the supervising anesthesiologist. Any patient of an AA is simultaneously a patient of the supervising anesthesiologist. Therefore, a CRNA who is relieving an AA for any reason should do so only at the request of and with the approval of the supervising anesthesiologist.

8. Q:What is the ratio of supervising physicians to AAs?

A: An anesthesiologist is permitted to supervise up to 4 AAs at the same time.

9. Are Anesthesiologist Assistants allowed to introduce themselves as Anesthetists?

A. No.Anesthesiologist's Assistants must introduce themselves as an Anesthesiologist's Assistant and NOT an Anesthetist.

10. Q: What Should a CRNA do if he/she observes a violation by an AA?

A: If a CRNA observes a violation involving an AA, of any rule or statute under which the AA practices, or which the CRNA considers a threat to the safety or well-being of a patient, the supervising anesthesiologist should be informed immediately. The supervising anesthesiologist is the practitioner who is directly responsible for the actions of the AA.

Additionally, if a CRNA observes an AA practicing in violation of law, the CRNA has an obligation to report such violation to the Department of Health. Rule 64B9-8.006 (u) requires all nurses to "report to the department any licensee . . . who the nurse knows has violated the grounds for disciplinary action set out in the law under which that person is licensed and who provides health care services in a facility licensed under Chapter 395, F.S., or a health maintenance organization certificated under Part I of Chapter 641, F.S., in which the nurse also provides services."

Here is the link for reporting violations to the Department of Health complaint (this can be done anonymously): <http://www.floridahealth.gov/licensing-and-regulation/enforcement/>