

Working life (anaesthetics)

This page provides useful information about the roles and responsibilities of anaesthetists, where they work, who they work with and what they feel about their role.

“In the operating theatre, we have so many monitoring screens to look at our working area resembles an aircraft cockpit. Outside the operating theatre, we spread our wings across almost every area of patient care.”

How your time is spent

Every day is different, but a typical day might start before 8am with visits to pre-operative patients and equipment tests before surgery begins. In the operating theatre, anaesthetists carry out different procedures. One patient may need a general anaesthetic while another may require an [epidural](#) [1] or local anaesthetic. Anaesthetists treat all sorts of conditions. Patients range in age from the elderly to babies (neonates) or even foetuses for some kinds of surgery.

Anaesthetists also have to deal with theatre emergencies. Some do more [intensive care](#) [2] management (ICM) than others. Ward work, administration, obstetrics and pain management clinics may also feature in an anaesthetist's day.

Anaesthetists must spend time on their own continuing education and professional development. They may be involved in teaching and training medical students, postgraduate doctors in training, nurses, midwives and paramedics. They contribute to the [clinical audit](#) [3] programme (to improve medical practice) and may also be involved in research.

[On call](#) [4] and working hours

Working hours are planned but they can be quite long and irregular including night work, weekend work and [on call](#) [4] rotas. The [on call](#) [4] requirement is variable, but typically one night a week and one weekend in anything from one in four to one in twelve (or even less). Good working relationships with colleagues will enable shift swaps where possible.

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**Who you will
work with?**

You'll work in the operating theatre team alongside:

- surgeons [5]
- operating department practitioners [6]
- anaesthesia associates [7]
- theatre nurses [8]
- theatre support workers [9]
- porters [10]
- radiographers [11]
- radiologists [12]
- recovery nurses

You'll also work closely with a very wide range of other healthcare professionals and medical secretaries and administrative staff.

Attractions and challenges of the role

Every anaesthetist will have different views about their role. Some enjoy the variety of work most of all. They like using the internet to check up on less common conditions and learning about new techniques and treatments that will improve patient safety or reduce the environmental impact of their practices ('green anaesthesia').

Some enjoy using their technical expertise and getting to know new equipment. Others enjoy caring for patients the most. They love the immediacy of results, seeing a patient through a difficult operation safely and giving them the confidence that all will be well.

Scared patients, problems with equipment and challenges working within a highly pressurised environment within the surgical team can be tricky to handle. One of the biggest challenges is learning from 'never events' (mistakes that should never have happened) such as in-hospital maternal death from post-partum haemorrhage ie the loss of more than 500 ml or 1,000 ml of blood within the first 24 hours following childbirth, after [elective](#) [13] caesarean section.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/anaesthesia/working-life>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Epidural>

[2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Intensive_care

[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Clinical_audit

[4] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/surgery>

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/operating-department-practice/operating-department-practitioner>

[7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/medical-associate-professions/roles-medical-associate-professions/anaesthesia-associates>

[8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/theatre-nurse>

[9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/theatre-support-worker>

[10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/support-services/porter>

[11] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/radiographer-diagnostic>

[12] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-radiology>

[13] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Elective>