

Real People in Anesthesia

The early career anesthesiologist.

Biggest challenges in transition from residency?

What stands out in my mind is the sudden realization that you're now the final decision maker regarding patient/case management, which makes you think longer and question some of your decisions initially. I noticed my practice became more conservative in my first few months as a consultant.

I also found finding the ideal work/life balance a little difficult during my first year of practice. Initially I ended up working all the weekends, partially because I was eager to pay off the debt I'd accumulated during training, and because I really enjoyed finally being able to practice independently. Without the previous rules/regulations that governed working hours during my residency training, I ended up working far longer hours than I had originally intended/envisioned. It took me a few months to finally arrive at a more appropriate balance.

What you wish you had known in advance? What does your partner wish they had known?

I wish I'd know in advance that the demands on my time would remain very high as a consultant. During residency, most of us had hoped that our schedules would become more flexible/relaxed once we completed the training program. Both my wife and I had expected this to be the case, and we were both disappointed to discover that this wasn't the case.

How do you see the evolution of your career over next 5 or more years?

I think to maintain the value/contribution of our specialty towards patient care, we'll need to be updating our skills routinely. I'd like to pursue some further training in echocardiography or regional anesthesia at some point in the future. Given the major advances in ultrasound technology, we'll need to be highly familiar with these technologies if we want to maintain our relevance.

Generational issues in workplace i.e. with colleagues?

I've found it important to keep in mind that when dealing with disputes between colleagues where there is a significant age gap to keep in mind that everyone is trying to do what they feel is best for the patient. Individual variations in practice are to be expected, and if a colleague is providing safe and effective care, the idiosyncrasies of their personal practice are up to them.

Occasionally senior staff tend to bully/pressure more junior staff into a certain patient care plan/pathway. This is a reality we must deal with in all aspects of health care. Realistically 99% of these disputes can be ended with a simple conversation. Fortunately, there have been very few conflicts I've seen that have escalated beyond that point.

How do you maintain balance between work and the rest of your life?

Fortunately for me, my wife has been very helpful in letting me know when I've been working too much. Having family and friends around is great to remind you if you've been away/absent at work for too long. It's easy to lose track of time when you're on call frequently, and you can lose track of how much time you've been working. Keeping strong relationships is a great life-line to prevent yourself from completely getting lost in your work.

Favorite stress management tools or activities?

I find the best way to relieve stress is vacation time away from work. It lets me separate myself from all aspects of work (email, scheduling) and the stress that goes along with it. I find that a few vacations to break up the monotony of work go a long way.

Advice to our current R5 residents?

Don't become overly stressed with the exam. Yes, it's a massive undertaking with respect to the amount of material you need to go over, as well as practicing for the oral exam. I think it's important to keep in mind that you've been learning the material for the previous 4 years, and that all the experience you've accumulated in the OR will help you with the exam too.

One sentence guiding principle?

Don't cut corners. That would be the best piece of advice I received. If you're suspicious or concerned about something, act on it.

How would you describe yourself?

Picky with respect to details.

Best things about anesthesia?

One my favorite things about anesthesia is our ability to participate in critical care (resuscitation, trauma) on a routine basis. It keeps you interested and helps to maintain your skill set. I also like the fact that since we don't carry patient lists/patient clinics, it's easy for us to take time off work whenever we like. I also really enjoy the OR environment, I find it a relaxing and collegial place (most of the time).

Fave pizza topping?

I'd have to go with a classic, pepperoni.

Suggestions for me?

I think the newsletter is good, it's probably the most effective way to reach the largest audience.