



How to qualify as an anaesthesiologist in South Africa

Anaesthesiology is the specialised branch of medicine that involves the examination, optimisation, delivery of anaesthesia and monitoring care for patients during surgery or other medical procedures. Becoming a specialist anaesthesiologist requires a significant amount of commitment and passion, with a minimum of 13 years of intensive training.

Here are the steps typically involved:

1. The first step is to qualify as a medical doctor by completing a six year undergraduate bachelors' degree - the MBChB/MBBch (Baccalaureus degree in Medicine and Baccalaureus degree in Surgery). In the last 18 months of the degree, students will be working part time at the hospital and must be able to juggle academics and clinical duties.
2. After obtaining the MBChB undergraduate degree, the next step is to complete the compulsory supervised practice years in the public sector. These are characterised by two years of internship and one year of community service.
3. After completion of the first two steps, the clinician will be able to register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as an Independent Practitioner in General Practice/GP.

Becoming a specialist:

Many of these doctors spend a number of years practicing as a general practitioner (GP) before choosing to specialise in anaesthesiology.

4. The doctor must work for at least 6 months as a medical officer in anaesthesiology, in the public sector, at a facility accredited for training of Diplomas. They must then apply for and successfully complete the Diploma in Anaesthesiology (DA). During this time, they can begin to apply for a specialist registrar training post at a University with a Department of Anaesthesiology.
5. Once successful in being appointed into a registrar training specialist post, clinicians have 4 years to write the next 2 sets of qualifying exams (Part I and Part II), and to complete their clinical rotations. During this time they will also need to complete a research project as part of the mandatory Masters in Medicine. The MMed is a requirement of the university and many of these original research projects are then published in local or international journals.



6. During this time, you will be required to study for and pass the Part I examination- which is the primary specialisation examination based on basic science knowledge related to anaesthesiology.

A registrar is admitted as a “Fellow” (specialist) to the College of Anaesthetists (CA) of the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA) after passing a single exit examination known as the FCA (SA) Part II. For admission to the Part II examination, the candidate needs to have passed a primary (Part I) examination in anaesthesiology. Candidates must also have spent 36 months in registrar training post, including three months in ICU, completed a portfolio of learning to be approved by the head of department. The Part II examination, which is the certifying examination, must be passed within 6 years of passing the Part I examination, but ideally within the 4-year training contract.

In conclusion, becoming an anaesthesiologist requires a significant amount of time and effort, but it is a very rewarding, and fulfilling career. The ability to positively contribute to a patient’s journey through their preoperative preparation, their surgery, and then enabling them to hopefully return home is a unique privilege. One of our most vulnerable times as human beings is on admission to hospital for surgery and so it requires a specific type of doctor with the ability and sensitivity to help us to navigate through this space safely and comfortably.