

panorama

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Helping hands in anesthesia care

Michael Ferrante, M.S.A., '13



Melanie Guthrie, M.S.A., A.A.-C., director of the School's Master of Science in Anesthesia program, hoods Michael Ferrante during the 2013 MSA graduation ceremony. Ferrante is one of the program's many anesthesiologist assistants who are filling a vital need for anesthesia providers in Missouri.

ROBERT STECKMEIST

HELPING HANDS FOR QUALITY CARE

Anesthesiologist assistant program provides new players for health care team

BY KELLY EDWARDS

Six months before he graduated from the UMKC School of Medicine's Master of Science in Anesthesia (MSA) program, Michael Ferrante interviewed for a position as an anesthesiologist assistant (AA), a highly skilled anesthesia provider who works under the direction of a licensed anesthesiologist. He was offered the job at Mercy Hospital in St. Louis a week later.

As new technology and medications make it possible for people with complex medical conditions to live longer, a growing number of patients is in need of surgical procedures and that translates into an increased need for anesthesia services and anesthesiologist assistants.

Ferrante earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Utah. He had worked as an anesthesia technician for five years. So with a desire to become an anesthesiologist assistant, Ferrante came to UMKC immediately after receiving his undergraduate degree. He said he had no problem finding the job he sought or fitting in with an anesthesia team after completing the MSA program at UMKC in May 2013.

"I began working one week after graduation and from day one on the job I felt prepared to provide safe, quality anesthesia services," Ferrante said. "As an anesthesia provider now, I have students from other AA programs rotate with me, and I can honestly say that UMKC, all around, has the best clinical year AA students of any AA program. I have full confidence that future UMKC MSA graduates will continue to be prepared to enter the field upon graduation."

This spring, the seven-semester program will graduate its fifth, and largest, class of 12 anesthesiologist assistants. As of May 2014, the School's MSA program will have produced 36 graduates, the majority of whom are providing anesthesia services in Missouri.

Since launching the MSA program six years ago, the School has expanded its allied health offerings to meet a broad spectrum of pressing local and regional health care needs. In 2012, the School appointed Julie Banderas, Pharm.D., as assistant dean for graduate studies and allied health to oversee those programs. This past January, the School began a

Master of Medical Science Physician Assistant program.

"As time goes on, I think it's critical for us to have these programs in the medical school because with the changes in the health care delivery system, more and more health care is going to be done in teams, not just by individuals," School of Medicine Dean Betty Drees, M.D., said. "And making sure that we have the educational programs here for the whole team to meet the workforce needs in our own state is critically important."

The MSA program, one of only 10 accredited anesthesiologist assistant programs in the country, is the only AA program housed in and administered by a medical school. Missouri is one of just 18 states in which anesthesiologist assistants are allowed to practice. Likewise, accredited AA programs are limited throughout the country. In fact, until recently when the University of Colorado started a program, all of the country's other MSA programs were located east of Kansas City.

Ferrante said he knew from his time as an anesthesia technician that this



Meggan McCue, M.S.A., '13, joined the anesthesia care team at Mercy Hospital in Springfield, Mo., after graduating from UMKC.

BRUCE STIDHAM

was the field of practice he wanted to enter. But Utah, where he graduated from college, is one of the many states that still do not license anesthesiologist assistants to practice. So Ferrante came to Kansas City to interview for the MSA program and spent a day shadowing Lance Carter, M.S.A., A.A.-C., assistant director of the program.

“It was everything I expected and more,” Ferrante said. “I had already decided to become an AA at that point, but shadowing Lance reinforced my decision to pursue this career. Going this route versus becoming a physician and doing an anesthesia residency, I felt, would allow me to make a more immediate impact on patients who need anesthesia services and allow me more time to focus on my family.”

Melanie Guthrie, M.S.A., A.A.-C., a licensed anesthesiologist assistant serves as director of the School’s MSA program. Guthrie said the UMKC program is close to reaching the planned maximum class size of 15 students, but is still growing from an educational standpoint. With three full-time anesthesiologist assistant faculty on hand, students have more one-on-one learning time with faculty. Enhanced time in the Clinical Training Facility and year-two course content are helping students better prepare for their certification exams, she said. Evidence-based medicine and professions-based courses were added to the MSA program this year as well as being included in the curriculum for the physician assistant students.

“Obviously, we’ve evolved,” Guthrie said. “We feel like we’ve consistently enhanced our program.”

Beginning this year, students in the program have an added experience of conducting a portion of their clinical training shoulder-to-shoulder with anesthesiologist residents in the Youngblood Medical Skills Lab at the new School of Medicine Clinical

Training Facility (SEE STORY ON PAGE 4). It’s a training environment that follows the medical care team model that is becoming prominent in today’s health care world, and promotes an understanding and the ability to work within the health care team.

“We’ve shown that there is a need in the fact that most of our graduates have taken jobs within the state, primarily in Kansas City and St. Louis. There are a lot of other places where we can expand.”

The anesthesiologist assistant practice has existed for almost as long as physi-

“I began working one week after graduation...”

Michael Ferrante

cian assistants, beginning more than 40 years ago. Missouri has experienced a rapid growth in the number of anesthesiologist assistants joining anesthesia care teams throughout the state. From the spring of 2011 to the fall of 2013, the number has jumped dramatically from 26 to 65 anesthesiologist assistants working at 11 Missouri hospitals.

Sam Page, M.D., '92, a St. Louis anesthesiologist, was a member of the Missouri House of Representatives when the Missouri Society of Anesthesiologists spurred the 2003 legislation that he co-sponsored and now allows licensed anesthesiologist assistants to practice.

“At the time, there was a great shortage of anesthesia providers in Missouri and this legislation was designed to help fill that need and allow AAs to practice in Missouri,” Page said.

The next step, Page said, was to establish a program in Missouri to educate and bring more of these critical members of the anesthesia care team into the state’s health care facilities. With financial backing from the state legislature, the UMKC School

of Medicine program got off the ground with five affiliate institutions where students could conduct their clinical rotations. Today, the MSA program works with 24 clinical affiliates that include hospitals in Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Washington, D.C. Five hospitals in the Kansas City area offer clinical training sites, including three of the School of Medicine’s affiliate hospitals — Children’s Mercy Kansas City, Saint Luke’s Hospital, and the Kansas City Veterans Administration Medical Center.

Page said one or two anesthesiologist assistant students from UMKC do clinical rotations every month where he works at Mercy Hospital St. Louis.

“The UMKC AA program holds a stellar reputation for the quality of graduates entering the workforce in Missouri,” he said.

Meggan McCue, M.S.A., '13, is a Kansas City native who spent six years as a respiratory therapist before coming to UMKC to be part of the School’s MSA program. McCue said she quickly became interested in becoming an anesthesiologist assistant when the School began its program. She had already studied pre-veterinary medicine and determined her real passion was to work not in a clinic setting but in an operating room. With her allied health background, McCue said the MSA program was a perfect fit for her.

“I am a little older than the traditional medical or veterinary student,” McCue said. “The AA program allowed me to finish my education and fulfill my professional goals on a timetable better suited to my personal situation.”

Now an anesthesiologist assistant at Mercy Hospital in Springfield, Mo., she too, found a full-time job waiting for her as soon as she graduated.

“I felt very well prepared to enter the workforce. The UMKC program was comprehensive and great,” McCue said. **P**