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CRNA: A Fresh Breath of Air

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The role of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) is a recognized specialty within nursing known for its rigorous training and high standards. CRNAs play a vital role in the world of healthcare as they provide anesthesia and related care before, during, and after surgical, therapeutic, diagnostic, and obstetrical procedures. The primary role of a CRNA is to ensure patient safety and comfort during procedures. They can practice in a variety of clinical settings, including surgical suites, emergency rooms, and specialized procedure centers. CRNAs have one of the most advanced scopes of practice within the nursing profession as they can independently manage respiratory and ventilatory care in emergent and non-emergent situations, initiate and participate in cardiopulmonary resuscitation that involves airway maintenance, ventilation, tracheal intubation, pharmacologic, cardiopulmonary support, and management of blood, fluid, electrolyte, and acid-base balance. This article will discuss the journey of an intensive care unit (ICU) registered nurse (RN), who embarked on the difficult yet rewarding career path of nursing anesthesia.

Melinda Serrano, a CRNA at UC San Diego Health, shares her inspiring journey, challenges, and insights into this highly prestigious profession within the world of nursing. In this article, we delve into the life and experiences of Melinda Serrano, who

embarked on a path to becoming a CRNA after finding her true calling, with determination, and a profound desire for independence in her nursing career.

Melinda Serrano began her journey as a registered nurse (RN) after graduating with her bachelors of science in nursing (BSN) from San Diego State University. As a new graduate RN, she dedicated the next three years of her work life to the Emergency Department at UC San Diego, a high-paced and challenging environment which provided her with invaluable experience and a glimpse into the multifaceted world of healthcare. Melinda then transitioned to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), where for roughly two years, she cared for critically ill patients, gaining insights into the intricacies of their care. During her time in the ICU, she became actively involved in UCSDH's Journey to Magnet hospital committee, a pivotal initiative aimed at achieving the esteemed Magnet status for the hospital. This endeavor, focused on elevating the quality of patient care and nursing excellence, would prove to be one of the steppingstones in her journey toward becoming a CRNA.

It was a personal turning point in Melinda's life that eventually led her to explore advanced practice degrees. She recalls, "I felt really empowered to pursue an advanced degree because I didn't feel tethered to anything - meaning I could do anything and go



Gian Roman, BSN, RN, CCRN, embarked on his nursing career in 2020 as a new graduate in the Intensive Care Unit at Paradise Valley Hospital. Throughout his tenure, he refined his leadership, critical thinking, and communication skills, all of which are essential for a career as a CRNA. In 2022, Gian joined the 10W CCU team at UCSDH and concurrently became a member of the Rapid Response Team for UCSD Hillcrest. Additionally, he collaborates with Dr. Jeremy Pettus, focusing on novel therapeutics in diabetes research at the ACTRI at UCSDH La Jolla. Gian Roman recently secured a position in the University of Arizona's CRNA program, anticipating a graduation date in 2027.

anywhere.” Her newfound freedom sparked a search for a path that was both challenging and rewarding. The Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) route caught her attention. One of the most alluring aspects of becoming a CRNA, according to Melinda, was the prestige associated with the profession and the unique ability to practice independently. She shared this with me having just completed her shift at a laser eye center, where she administered anesthesia without the supervision of an anesthesiologist. “This is the only advanced practice degree where you have the freedom to do things like this, and I absolutely love it.”

While the prospect of becoming a CRNA held undeniable appeal, Melinda was candid about the challenges that Registered Nurses (RNs) interested in this career would face. “The school requirements are very serious,” she emphasized. Melinda went on to explain that aspiring CRNAs must meticulously scrutinize the prerequisites of each school, considering criteria such as specific coursework, GPA requirements, GRE scores, and clinical experience. Drawing from her experience, she highlighted that some candidates she encountered during her tenure on the university’s admission committee were immediately disqualified for not meeting all the stringent requirements.

Before embarking on her CRNA journey, Melinda was working full-time night shifts in the ICU. However, her determination led her to enroll in courses such as biochemistry and chemistry while also preparing for the GRE. When asked about the intensity of her pre-CRNA preparations, she chuckled and remarked, “That was nothing compared to CRNA school.” For Melinda, the pursuit of her dream was not without its hurdles. When queried about the challenges she encountered during CRNA school, she had a swift and honest answer: “Lack of sleep.” She recounted the rigorous demands of her CRNA education, describing the feeling of “never being done.” After completing a clinical shift, she often found herself rushing home to work on a clinical write-up, all the while knowing that she had to attend classes the following day. The relentless

workload and ceaseless demands of CRNA school were a testament to the profession’s high standards. In Melinda’s words, “the work never stops.” The sacrifices she made in pursuit of her CRNA dream were undoubtedly demanding, but her dedication and commitment shone through. She emphasized the importance of resilience and advised prospective CRNA students to “keep going and take one thing at a time.” In her experience, focusing on retaking prerequisite classes and then preparing for the GRE can help simplify the process. She stressed that getting into CRNA school is an attainable goal, and with tenacity, navigating through the demanding program is also within reach.

Melinda’s journey from an RN to a CRNA represents a remarkable transformation. As a CRNA, she plays a pivotal role in patient care, ensuring their comfort and safety during surgical procedures. This unique role offers her a sense of independence that few other medical professions can match. CRNAs administer anesthesia in a variety of clinical settings, including surgical suites, emergency rooms, and even specialized centers like the laser eye

center where Melinda works. They are highly trained in anesthetic techniques, patient monitoring, and pain management, making them vital members of the healthcare team. Despite the challenges and demanding nature of the CRNA educational pathway, Melinda’s story is a beacon of hope for aspiring CRNAs. Her journey is a testament to the attainability of this distinguished and rewarding career. The path to becoming a CRNA is arduous, but with persistence, dedication, and a step-by-step approach, it is achievable.

Readers interested in CRNA as a profession may find out more here:

<https://nursejournal.org/nurse-anesthetist/how-to-get-into-crna-school/>

<https://nurse.org/articles/nurse-anesthetist-crna-schools-by-state/>

What are the Requirements to Get into Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) School?

Students applying to a CRNA program will encounter varying requirements depending on the school. These may include:

- Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing (BSN)
- Active unrestricted RN license
- At least 2-3 years of critical care experience
- GPA of at least 3.0 and a GRE score of at least 300 (if required)
- Prerequisite coursework
- Current BLS, ACLS, and PALS, and CCRN certifications
- Shadow a CRNA for at least 8-40 hours
- Letters of recommendation
- Admissions essay and interview (if invited)
- Current resume or curriculum vitae (CV)