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Overview

During certain operations, such as open heart surgery, the doctors must stop the patient's heart. A heart-lung machine is used to keep the patient's blood flowing until the heart can be restarted. The person who operates the heart-lung machine is called a cardiac perfusionist.

If the patient requires additional blood products or medications during the procedure, the perfusionist can administer these through the heart-lung machine. The perfusionist also monitors and controls the patient's body temperature by increasing or decreasing the temperature of the patient's blood as it passes through the machine.

In addition to these critical responsibilities in the operating theater, the perfusionist also evaluates and selects new equipment, orders supplies, and oversees technical support staff.

Working Conditions

As part of the surgical team, the perfusionist is expected to be familiar with the patient's medical history and current health status. Before the surgery begins, the perfusionist and the doctor will determine which circulation equipment and techniques will be used.

In the operating room, the perfusionist sets up the equipment and makes sure it is working properly. Once the patient is connected to the machine, the perfusionist continuously monitors the equipment to control the speed of blood circulation, the patient's temperature, and the composition of the blood, adding blood products and medications when ordered by the surgeon. The perfusionist keeps the surgical team informed of the patient's condition throughout the surgery.

Perfusionists are most often employed by hospitals and surgical centers. Most work a regular 40-hour week, but they may be required to work overtime and on weekends and holidays if their services are required in the operating room. In facilities that perform a large number of open heart surgeries, perfusionists may work in shifts to ensure that a trained perfusionist is available 24 hours a day.

Experienced perfusionists can go on to teach in certification programs, conduct research, and work for perfusion equipment suppliers.

Salary Range & Job Outlook

The American Society for ExtraCorporeal Technology expects hospitals to hire more perfusionists in coming years, as the American population ages. Cardiovascular disease is more common in older people, so more patients may need open heart surgery.

Perfusion is also being used in more types of surgery to correct heart defects and treat heart disease. The more surgeries that require perfusion, the more perfusionists will be needed.

Certified Clinical Perfusionists [earn](#) an average of \$65,000 per year. Salaries can range from \$45,000 to \$80,000.

Academic Requirements

Perfusionists typically complete a four-year degree plus specialized training to satisfy the requirements of certification. The Certified Clinical Perfusionist (CCP) credential is administered by the American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion.

CCP applicants complete an accredited training program in cardiovascular perfusion and perform a minimum of 75 perfusions to sit for the certification exam. Recertification, including continuing education and work experience, is required on an annual basis.

Because they work in the operating room and use life-sustaining equipment, perfusionists must be able to handle acute stress and perform under severe pressure. Some surgeries can go on for many hours, requiring a high level of endurance.

Perfusionists also must keep pace with technological changes in the profession, and continually upgrade their skills.

Professional Associations

- [American Society of ExtraCorporeal Technology](#)
- [American Academy of Cardiovascular Perfusion](#)

Funding Opportunities

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