
Tips for New Staff

University of Washington Department of Anesthesiology

www.uwanesthesiology.org

Introduction

The Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Washington is spread over four hospitals. However, the administration is run out of the University of Washington Health Sciences Building. The UWMC is a general hospital and a specialist cardiac and obstetric hospital. This is where you sign all sorts of documentation on your first day in town. Contact the department's main office for details at (206) 543-2470. The hospitals are the University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC), Harborview Medical Center (HMC-the trauma center), the Veterans Affairs Puget Sound Health Care System (VAMC - a hospital for veterans and their dependents), and the Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center (CHRMC). There are well over 80 attending (= consultant) staff with many having a high research involvement. There are also a smaller number of PhD faculty who do just research. Residents number about 60, with about 8 fellows each year in a variety of areas including pain, pediatrics, cardiac, trauma, obstetrics and neuroanesthesia.

The various hospitals (UWMC, HMC, VAMC and CHRMC) are staffed independent of each other and are fairly autonomous in the clinical sphere. Each hospital will have a Clinical Chief. You will be based primarily at one hospital.

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Research

The department has all kinds of research going on. To learn about the specific areas of research available, please talk with the Chair of the department or the Vice Chair of Clinical Research. They will be glad to steer you in the right direction.

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The Internet

The University of Washington has an easy hookup to the internet and your email is free, even if you do it from home. Business usage is subject to rules provided by the University of Washington.

These rules and general information about computing can be found at the [University of Washington Computing and Networking site](#).

Post (Postal and Mail Services)

For current rates of postage for letters and parcels for domestic and overseas locations, please consult the U.S. Postal Service website at www.usps.com.

In addition to the U.S. Postal Service, there are other private postal outlets in the United States. These companies are more expensive than the U.S. Postal Service, and do not provide all the services of the U.S. Postal Service, such as the processing of registered letters, etc. However, these private companies are also open during the weekends and may have opening times more convenient for some customers. Currently, there is no 24-hour U.S. Postal Office in Seattle.

Airport

The local airport is called [SeaTac](#), and lies half way between Seattle and Tacoma. It is 15 miles from the downtown area of Seattle. Cabs are about 40 (\$US) to downtown Seattle. A service called Shuttle Express delivers door to door for a lot less. Shuttles to prominent hotels downtown are also available for about 10 (\$US). Renting a mid-sized car at the airport for a week will cost about 200 (\$US).

Recreation

Seattle is very green and is surrounded by mountains. Many recreational activities are available. Depending on the season these activities include skiing, water skiing, wind surfing, hiking, mountain climbing, snow boarding, taking in professional sports (we have professional basketball, baseball and football teams), taking trips to Canada or to other interesting parts of the US. There is a very good Ballet Company here. Many Broadway shows come here. Jazz is a major attraction. In other words, there is a lot to do. Somewhere in this section we should mention that Seattle is the coffee capital of the US and you will all have to learn how to adapt to a caffeinated society.

Practice requirements: Medical License and Insurance

The entire medical faculty of the University of Washington self insures as a group. The premium for this is part of your package and is not taken out of your salary. The University does this because it is able to pay less than outside arrangements and still provide complete coverage. This coverage only covers you if you are working in the department.

Medical Staff Privileges

This refers to the procedure of getting credentialing papers signed at each of the hospitals where you work. This ensures that you have had the requisite training and skills to function as an attending (=consultant). It is important to get your credentialing papers signed a minimum of four months before you arrive. You will be steered in the right direction by the administrative staff.

Medical License

This, in the end, will be given to you by the licensing authority in the Washington State capitol of Olympia. A U.S. social security number is required for issuance of a Washington State medical license. You will need to apply early in the whole process. After you have completed your

application the departmental office will submit it to Olympia. The address of the licensing authority is:

Washington State Department of Health
Health Professions Quality Assurance
310 Israel Rd
Tumwater WA 98501
Email: hpqa.csc@doh.wa.gov
Phone: (360) 236 – 4700
Fax: (360) 236 - 4818

The Medicolegal Environment And Malpractice Insurance

This area is often a cause of anxiety with new overseas staff. The insurance arrangements are as follows. The entire medical faculty of the University of Washington self insures as a group. The premium for this is part of your package and is not taken out of your salary. The University does this because it is able to pay less than outside arrangements and still provide complete coverage. This coverage only covers you if you are working in the department. It does not cover outside work at all and definitely does not provide coverage in other U.S. states. If you consider providing some care and you are uncertain about the coverage (e.g., providing medical assistance for an athletic event for free or working on the ski patrol), please talk to the department's clinical director at (206) 543-2470, before doing anything.

The practical day to day medico legal situation is different in some aspects. Each hospital has a risk management department which likes to hear about any mishaps early so that they can intervene and try to minimize the damage. This can be as minor as dental mishaps during intubation (where risk management will supervise the free dental service that will follow) or as major as dealing with the family after an unexpected severe complication (which will involve consideration of adjustment of billing, paying for all other medical care, dealing with any explanations to the family, and dealing with a lawsuit). Please get risk management involved early if a mishap occurs.

This department is very sensitive with respect to new staff in terms of trying to prevent mishaps. You will not be placed in cases which are unfamiliar to you without appropriate orientation. This especially applies to taking call. We encourage new staff to discuss any concerns about any particular case with one of the permanent staff. We encourage this collegial attitude among staff, rather than having staff get into a situation they are uncomfortable with.

Overall the medico legal "stress" is less than might be expected from all the publicity which goes overseas.

ECFMG

The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates or ECFMG (www.ecfm.org) has two possible roles in your trip to the US. One role is in regulating which exams, if any, you have to pass to be allowed to come here. This sort of thing changes about every three years and the Chair, will be able to find out if you need to take any such exam to get here. ECFMG is required for most fellowship (trainee) positions. ECFMG is not required for most visiting faculty positions.

The other role has to do with sponsoring your trip here. It may be that the ECFMG in fact is the outfit which sponsors your trip, in which case they have to process all sorts of papers as well. This

step was added a few years ago to stop local abuses of the rules. ECFMG is a part of the federal government and can be quite slow at times. If you are processed this way, do not despair, as most of your predecessors have traveled this path. It works out in the end.

Working With Residents

During the course of their training, residents in the USA do fewer cases compared to their cohorts in Australia, or New Zealand or the UK or most other places. Consequently, the residents expect to derive more experience and benefit from each case in terms of practical procedures and teaching by attending anesthesiologists. They are prepared to work a lot harder to get the experience, teaching and benefits, and genuinely appreciate any effort you make to teach. In fact, compared to many other residency programs, the program at the University of Washington has somewhat of a good reputation for teaching by overseas faculty. If you have a teaching point to make, it really helps to explain the point or to give references. The residents are likely to be very appreciative of such efforts.

Although it is a small point: please get the residents out early for their lunch and dinner breaks, because you will be likely running two rooms and it is all too easy to get distracted and in the end everybody eats late.

One last note: The US is fairly well advanced in the area of regulations governing relationships at work and how you should behave. Specifically, with respect to reacting to people of different race or sexuality, we are all expected to behave in an unprejudiced manner. This is almost certainly the case in many overseas countries and this comment is not meant to offend, rather, it is to confirm the ground rules as they exist.

Visa and Social Security Number and Permanent Residency

Visas

The central administrative staff will be in charge of organizing your visa before you come, and also in renewing visas. This process requires substantial lead time (5 to 6 months). The type of visa is usually chosen by the Chairman in conjunction with the advice he gets from the appropriate immigration experts in the University system. **If there is any need to get documents organized or exams to take, please do this early.** The staff does not mind getting contacted about any difficulties. For assistance, please contact Sheri Tokunaga, phone number: (206) 543-2673, or email sgoto@u.washington.edu.

Spouse's Visa

Visiting faculty are normally sponsored on H-1B visas. The spouse of the worker on an H-1B is issued an H-4 status which does not allow the spouse to work. A useful side effect of having a J-1 visa is that the spouse is able to get a J-2 which allows them to work with permission from the INS, within the time constraints of the person who is working in the anesthesia job. This can be organized from within the U.S. after arrival but may be possible to organize before coming. Please consult with the U.S. consulate in your home country.

Social Security Number

The Social Security Number is one of the most important documents issued to an individual by the U.S. government. The Social Security Number indicates that you are a legal alien. After having

received all the necessary documents from your employer, such as the employment contract, the first thing to do is to apply for a Social Security Number (SSN). The application form for the Social Security Number is available online or at any Social Security Office. Please do this in the first week as it takes about three to four weeks to process.

- Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov, 1-800-772-1213. To locate the nearest office, use www.ssa.gov/locator
- In Downtown Seattle, the office is at 901 Lenora, Suite 100 Seattle Washington 98121. Office Phone: (800) 772-1213; Office Hours: Monday to Friday: 0900-1600

You will not be issued a Washington State Medical License until you have a social security number.

You must be very careful about disclosing your Social Security Number to anybody, because that is one of the main sources of identity theft. **Very few institutions are entitled to ask for the full Social Security Number.** Many institutions may ask for the last four digits of the Social Security Number for verification purposes.

Identity Theft

Identity theft is on the rise in the United States. The best protection is to shred all items containing personal information once you are finished with them. Valuable information about how to protect yourself from identity theft, as well as other issues, can be obtained from the Federal Citizen Information Center, www.pueblo.gsa.gov.

Photo Identity

Most institutions may require a photo identity (photo ID) from a person for a transaction. One can carry one's passport around all the time or get an American photo identity. A Washington State driver's license and Identification Card are accepted as photo ID. It is strongly advisable to get a photo ID as you will be asked to show photo identification for such diverse and routine activities as renting a video or buying alcohol at the supermarket.

Washington Identification Card

The Department of Licensing issues photo identification cards to **non-drivers** for a fee of \$15.00 for an original. Identification cards can be issued at any age and are valid for 5 years. Duplicate identification cards are \$15.00. You must show the same identification as required for a driver license. The required documentation is available on the Washington State Department of Licensing website, www.dol.wa.gov.

Permanent residency

The "Green Card" is the popular name for the permanent residency status of a non-US citizen in the United States. The "Green Card" is a credit card-sized plastic card which is now beige in color. In order to obtain a "Green Card", one has to be "sponsored", either by an American national, for instance, through marriage, or an American institution or corporation through permanent employment. The only exception is the "Diversity Visa Lottery", also called the "Green Card Lottery", which raffles off 50,000 Green Cards annually to eligible individuals from eligible countries.

For information on the next "Diversity Visa Lottery", please check the website of the U.S. Department of State, www.state.gov.

Law firms will advertise their services for completion of the participation documents for the annual "Diversity Visa Lottery" for a fee. Although it is at each individual's discretion to use those services, this is not really necessary or proper completion of a participation form. The participation form requirements are deliberately designed for ease of use, in order to give each individual from an eligible country the chance to successfully participate in the "Diversity Visa Lottery".

Acquiring money: Annual allowance, Bank loans

Money

The American currency is issued in the following coins and notes. For most daily living, the most useful of all coins and bills are the 25 cent coin, which is accepted by all payphones and vending machines, and the 1 dollar bill, which is accepted by most vending machines.

Coin	Notes
1 "cent" coin "Penny"	\$1 "dollar" bill
5 coin "Nickle"	\$2 bill (seldom used)
10 coin "Dime"	\$5 bill
25 coin "Quarter"	\$10 bill
\$1 coin (gold Sacagawea, seldom used)	\$50 bill
\$1 coin (silver Susan B. Anthony, seldom used)	\$100 bill

Allowance

Visiting faculty get an annual academic allowance of 1500 (\$US) to spend on professional meetings, books and other academic expenses.

How Much Money To Bring

It is advisable to bring about 10,000-15,000 (\$US) to cover initial expenses, (e.g. monthly rent of \$1000 + last month's rent of \$1000 + damage deposit of \$300 = \$2300, plus furnishings as very few rental accommodations are rented furnished). Cheap furniture is available at charity organizations, such as Goodwill and St. Vincent de Paul.

What You Can Survive On Financially

This is obviously dependent on your spending habits and vacations, but it is worth noting what the residents and fellows are surviving on with not a lot left over for savings. The residents are all earning from \$42,132 to \$49,284 gross before deductions and the fellows earn about \$51,780. Clearly if you are able to secure any additional funding from your home country then this can help a great deal.

Banks

It is worthwhile establishing an account with a U.S. bank in advance of your arrival in the United States. Many U.S. banks have links with banks overseas. Enquire with your own bank if it has an association with any U.S. banks.

Credit Cards

Most outlets in the U.S. accept credit cards. Exceptions may be government agencies which sometimes access only cash or checks.

Establishing a credit history

Unlike other countries, credit worthiness in the United States is not based on an individual's employment history or income, but on his / her credit history. A credit history in the United States can only be established with a credit card issued by a U.S. bank. The credit history applies only to those individuals whose names appear on the account. Debit cards automatically issued with the opening of a current account in the U.S. will not contribute to a credit history. Credit cards issued by banks outside the U.S. are not accepted for a credit history in the U.S. For individuals planning to stay in the U.S. for more than one year, the creation of a credit history can be of great importance.

The easiest way for a newcomer to the U.S. to create a credit history is to apply for a credit card with a U.S. bank by paying a deposit functioning as a secured credit limit. All banks and also some corporations, such as airlines, and bookstore and supermarket chains, offer this kind of secured credit card covered by a deposit, often starting as low as 200 (\$US). One can choose a higher deposit to start with, or increase the deposit over time. The deposit will be transferred for one year onto a blocked savings account paying a low interest rate. By using the credit card, it is then important to pay off the accumulated debt on a monthly basis. After one year, the secured credit card has to be cancelled, so that the deposit becomes available to the account holder again. Most banks, however, will retain the deposit for one year plus one month to cover possible late claims. At that time, the bank or corporation will review the credit history of the individual and if all credits have been paid off in a timely fashion, an unsecured credit card can be applied for by the residents ("Green Card" holders) or American citizens only.

It is important to know that only credit payoffs over at least six months duration will contribute to the establishment of a credit history. The goal is to create a **good** credit history with regular payoffs of debt. For the creation of a **sufficient** credit history, one should regularly pay off at least the minimum amount demanded by the monthly credit bill. For the creation of a **good** credit history, one should regularly pay off at least 2-3 times the minimum amount demanded by the monthly credit bill. However, it is financially advisable to pay off the monthly credit in full because of the high interest rates credit cards charge for unpaid credits. The advantage of a good credit history in the U.S. is the much lower interest rates one will be charged for goods purchases in installments, such as cars, etc.

Loans

All the banks have a very easy attitude towards loans. The most common one used by new staff from overseas is in the purchase of a vehicle. You will be able to use the car as collateral for the loan. As a Washington state employee you are eligible to join the Washington State Employees Credit Union (www.wastatecu.org) or the School Employees Credit Union of Washington (www.secuwa.org), which offer low interest car loans.

Health Insurance

You will be supported very well as part of your job package. It is wise to get coverage from your home country for the brief time when you have arrived but have not yet signed all the papers at the University of Washington.

Health and dental insurance coverage

You will be supported very well as part of your job package. It is wise to get coverage from your home country for the brief time when you have arrived but have not yet signed all the papers at the UWMC. After that you will have coverage by a standard plan (which is comprehensive) until you have had a chance to look over all the choices. The choices are all presented to you in a book for you to study. Depending on the plan you select, some plans have monthly premiums. If you do not make a choice you will default back to the standard plan. The coverage is for you and your spouse and any eligible dependents. All plans cover travel in other parts of the U.S. Irrespective of insurance plans, you should anticipate paying some proportion of each bill.

Same-Sex Domestic Partners are eligible for medical/dental and life insurance.

For more information on the University of Washington's health plans, please visit the [UW Human Resources website](#).

Hotels, Housing and Schools

Hotel Accommodations when you first get into town

It is reasonable to arrive and look around first:

- [Hotels near the University of Washington](#)

Public Schools in Seattle

The Seattle School District: www.seattleschools.org

Accommodation

Several alternatives exist for you to look at with regard to accommodation. The Visiting Faculty Housing Service provides housing listings for new and visiting UW faculty and staff requiring rental housing. The requirements of the university person seeking accommodation are matched with the listing attributes of an owner's property.

Visiting Faculty Housing Service

UW Seattle campus, Cunningham Hall , Room 213.

The office hours are 9:30 - 12:30, Monday through Friday except holidays.

E-mail: vfhs@u.washington.edu

Telephone: 206-543-6252

Surface mail: VFHS, The University of Washington, Box 351380, Seattle, WA, 98195

Home Page: www.depts.washington.edu/uwfacaux/vfhs.html

It is reasonable to arrive and look around first. One alternative which has been used in the past is to come to the University Travelodge and use a suite for a week while you get situated. This is a convenient location close to the University and good shops (phone number: 206-525-4612). Another alternative is the Silver Cloud Inn (phone number: 206-526-5200).

The cost of accommodation varies. For example, in the Greenlake district of Seattle, a 2 bedroom house costs \$1100 per month. In Kirkland, a city across Lake Washington, east of Seattle, a 2 bedroom apartment costs from \$750-1100 per month. On Mercer Island in Lake Washington, a 2 bedroom house may cost at least \$1400 per month. These have to be taken as approximate but will give you a rough idea. Most rental accommodations will require you to pay both first month's and last month's rent **in advance**, plus a damage deposit. The damage deposit typically costs 500-1000 (\$US).

Automobile Tips

Driver's License

If you bring an International Drivers License, please note it only works if attached to the actual license from your native country. It is legal coverage for only **three** months, although there are many folks who do not get their Washington drivers license until much later. It is best to get this as as soon as possible.

Washington State Department of Licensing, www.dol.wa.gov

Nearby Drivers Licensing Offices

- Bellevue: 525 156th Avenue SE Bellevue, WA 98007 Ph. (206) 649-4281
- Seattle-Greenwood: 320 North 85th Street, Seattle, WA 98103 Ph. (206) 706-4269
- Seattle-North: 907 North 135th Street, Seattle, WA 98133, Ph. (206) 368-7261

Tips for taking your driving test

Do it at a suburban spot where it will be a little easier. Once you have passed the written test, do not wait around for the allocated time slot to do the practical. Ask for any earlier spots that have appeared as other people may have changed their minds. A practice test is available on the Washington State Department of Licensing website, www.dol.wa.gov.

Automobile Insurance

The only other insurance you have to have is automobile insurance. It is worthwhile shopping around for different rates. A good driving record in another country, provided you have some evidence to back you up, will reduce your premium. An original copy of a letter from your automobile company outlining your good driving record may be helpful. Car insurance is VERY dependent on your driving record and will change if you get any driving tickets. Car insurance is required by law and can be quite expensive compared to overseas rates. Other insurance is up to you and really come down to house insurance, which is usually not very expensive.

Other Transportation

Apart from private cars, Seattle has a very good bus system which has been often used by overseas faculty and residents. It is cheap and the University affiliation gets you a reduction in the fare as well. For information about public transportation in Seattle and King County, please check the website, <http://tripplanner.metrokc.gov>.

Many residents and staff use bikes in the summer months to get to work as many parts of the city have bike trails which are conveniently placed. There is also a shuttle which goes between the University of Washington Medical Center and Harborview Medical Center Monday-Friday every 15 minutes between 0600h and 1800h. This shuttle is free.

Taxes

Every country has a tax treaty with the US but some are more favorable than others. You will be paid by one and possibly two separate "employers". One is the University and the other is the billing agency which supervises the billing of all the patients having care (this group is called confusingly "University of Washington Physicians").

Taxation

Income and Sales Tax

In the United States, there are several different kinds of taxes that one is required to pay. While everybody has to pay federal income tax, the taxes you pay from state to state may vary. In Washington State, there is no state income tax, but there is a sales tax. That means that a resident of Washington State had to pay a sales tax, in addition to the price listed for goods. The sales tax will be added at the till. There are exceptions from this rule, such as food. Foreign nationals from many countries may work in the U.S. income tax free for up to two years (depending on the specific tax treaties). The countries having tax treaties with the U.S. and the exact wording of these treaties can be found in U.S Tax Treaties - Publication 901, Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service www.irs.gov.

It is recommended that you directly consult with a tax adviser concerning specific tax liabilities.

Special considerations on Income Tax

You will be paid by one and possibly two separate "employers". One is the University of Washington and the other is the billing agency which supervises the billing of all the patients having care (this group is called confusingly "University of Washington Physicians"). If you are a Fellow, then the University of Washington will be your primary employer. If you are a visiting faculty member, you will be paid by both the University of Washington and University of Washington Physicians. You should know that your income tax deduction has VERY LITTLE to do with the actual amount you find you should have paid when you do your tax return (the tax year ends December 31 and the returns are done in early April). Some of us have had very nasty surprises. The reality is that you have to find out early what you will be liable for and the news is not always bad.

For example, if you have any children, substantial deductions are routine. If you come in the middle of the year (as most of you will), your income in the TAX year will be minimal and your tax will be reduced. Every country has a tax treaty with the US but some are more favorable than others. Another tax reducing method is to deduct all the expenses which were incurred getting to the US. There is a limit to this deduction but keeping all these receipts is useful.

For US federal income tax purposes, dependents need an identification number through the IRS (if they do not have a social security number) before they can be declared dependents. The IRS phone number to obtain a W7 form (identification number application) is 1-800-829- 3676.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has a local office which has awful delays on the phone but is quite helpful if you go in person.

It is recommended that you consult early with an accountant regarding US Taxation concerns.