Randall D. Moore, DNP, MBA, CRNA
Francis Gerbasi, PhD, CRNA
Bruce A. Schoneboom, PhD, CRNA, FAAN, COL(ret), ANC, USA

Setting the Record Straight: Comparing the Education of a CRNA and an Anesthesiologist

For years our anesthesiologist colleagues have skewed the data when it comes to reporting how long their medical education takes to become an anesthesiologist and comparing that to the educational preparation of a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA). For instance the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA’s) campaign “When Seconds Count…Physician Anesthesiologists Save Lives” reports that their medical education requires up to 14 years to complete and 12,000 to 16,000 hours of clinical training “to make critical, split-second decisions that can save your life”.¹ They also frequently underreport the years and clinical education of CRNAs. For example in their resources for policymakers they state that “nurses” in opt-out states who are allowed to administer anesthesia without physician supervision only have a median of 1,651 hours of clinical training.² Both of these metrics are inaccurate!

In response to these false claims the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) and the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (COA) did their own analysis of the education and clinical requirements for anesthesiologists and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs). Clinical hours for physicians in anesthesia residency programs were reported by the Anesthesia Quality Institute in their fourth annual edition titled “Anesthesia in the United States, 2013.”³ This guest editorial provides a more realistic number of clinical hours for CRNAs attained relative to their nurse anesthesia education, including required critical care nursing experience and nurse anesthesia program clinical experiences.

Keywords: Anesthesiologist clinical hours, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist clinical hours, clinical experience, critical care, nurse anesthesia education.
Anesthetists 2016 annual report most registered nurses have on average 2.9 years or 6,032 hours of critical care experience before entering a nurse anesthesia program, as well as over 2,604 hours of clinical experience in their nurse anesthesia programs, totaling 8,636 of clinical experience, which is a substantial and significant difference from the 1,651 hours that the ASA reports in their media campaign “When Seconds Count...”.

In conclusion, based on our analysis, the reporting by the ASA that anesthesiologists’ education includes 12,000-16,000 hours of clinical training is misleading because the data clearly show that anesthesiologists barely attain 12,000 clinical hours during their transitional year and residency program. In contrast, a realistic number of clinical hours for CRNAs attained relative to their nurse anesthesia education, including required critical care nursing experience and nurse anesthesia program clinical experiences, is approximately 8,636. No one is disputing that the clinical preparation for an anesthesiologist is different than that of a CRNA. However, let’s be truthful in the advertising; CRNAs have a significant amount of clinical experience before becoming a CRNA and this experience contributes to the incredible safety record and quality that CRNAs bring to the care of their patients. CRNAs are there every breath, every beat, every second!

REFERENCES

AUTHORS
Randall D. Moore, DNP, MBA, CRNA, is the chief executive officer of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists in Park Ridge, Illinois.

Francis Gerbasi, PhD, CRNA, is the chief executive officer of the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs.

Bruce A. Schoneboom, PhD, CRNA, FAAN, COL(ret), ANC, USA, is the senior director, Education and Professional Development, at the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists.

DISCLOSURES
Randall D. Moore, DNP, MBA, CRNA, and Bruce A. Schoneboom, PhD, CRNA, FAAN, COL(ret), ANC, USA, are employed by the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Francis Gerbasi, PhD, CRNA, is employed by the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs.