



# LETTERS

## EXPANSION OF NURSE ANESTHESIA EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: WHERE ARE THE BARRIERS?

### To the Editor:

I commend the authors of the December 2002 *AANA Journal* "Guest Editorial" titled "Expansion of nurse anesthesia educational programs: Where are the barriers?" (Ouellette SM, Bruton-Maree N, Kohlenberg E. *AANA J.* 2002;70:435-438) for calling attention to a continually underappreciated problem that does not appear to be receiving sufficient effort. As a profession, we continue to produce too few new nurse anesthetists to meet demand. The void in anesthesia providers will be filled; however, we are not meeting our responsibility to see that it is filled with highly qualified, historically validated nurse anesthetists.

A barrier to expansion of nurse anesthesia graduate programs not considered in the editorial is the lack of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists fully qualified to become university faculty members. We tend to prepare clinicians, not educators. As such, it can be difficult to recruit qualified faculty even when the recruiting process spans a year or more. Most of us in education have "found our way" without guidance, mentorship, or an established pathway for preparation as an educator. This lack of process is probably not the best way to produce a cadre of high quality nurse anesthesia educators.

While the AANA has consistently made important efforts to facilitate the preparation of educators with pro-

grams, such as the faculty fellowship and writing workshop, a more comprehensive and ongoing effort is needed. In addition to asking, "What are the barriers to expansion of nurse anesthesia education programs?" we need to ask, "What are the barriers to producing qualified nurse anesthesia educators?" Without expert CRNA educators, expansion of nurse anesthesia education will continue to be difficult.

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### Response:

We wish to thank Michael Fiedler, CRNA, PhD, for a thoughtful, relevant response to our "Guest Editorial" titled "Expansion of nurse anesthesia educational programs: Where are the barriers?" We agree that lack of qualified Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) faculty is a critical issue that must be addressed.

There continues to be a high turnover of CRNA faculty, particularly program directors. This topic was addressed by McCall et al in an *AANA Journal* "Guest Editorial" titled "An analysis of factors influencing nurse anesthesia educational program director turnover."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to overseeing didactic and clinical requirements, directors must keep many internal and external customers happy. Internal customers include students, CRNA and physician instructors, surgeons, patients, and administrators; external customers include university faculty and administration, administration and faculty at

numerous clinical affiliates, accrediting bodies (National League for Nursing, Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs, etc), the public, and future employers. Survival of the director is dependent on the interest of all groups being in concert, which is not always the case. The job often requires homework, and the director and faculty may be reimbursed at a rate lower than a clinical position.

We encourage the AANA Education Committee to continue to offer sessions relative to everyday issues faced by faculty. Time for group interaction concerning difficult situations also is beneficial.

### REFERENCE

1. McCall GW, Alves SL, Brooks DY, Fallacaro MD, Gray GC, Ritter D. An analysis of factors influencing nurse anesthesia educational program director turnover. *AANA J.* 1997;65:537-542.

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