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anesthesia



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American Association of Nurse Anesthetists Statement to the HHS Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force

The American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) is the professional association representing more than 52,000 Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) and student registered nurse anesthetists (SRNAs). These anesthesia experts personally administer more than 43 million anesthetics to patients each year in the United States and are crucial to ensuring patients access to safe, cost-effective pain management services. The AANA requests that the Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force to advocate for recognizing all advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), including CRNAs, to practice to the full extent of their education, training, certification and scope of practice. CRNAs are highly educated anesthesia professionals whose record of safe, quality patient care has been confirmed through decades of scientific research. As providers of anesthesia care for every type of procedure that requires it, and as the sole anesthesia providers in the vast majority of rural hospitals, it is vital that the Task Force promote using CRNAs to the full scope of their practice. The Task Force should also work to ensure that future policy does not create unintended barriers to the use of CRNA services, so patients will be able to receive consistently safe and high-quality anesthesia care without having to travel long distances to receive it.

CRNAs are educated and trained to handle every aspect of the delivery of comprehensive anesthesia services including general and regional anesthesia and acute, chronic, and interventional pain management services. Many patients rely on CRNAs as their primary pain care specialist. CRNAs manage chronic pain in a compassionate, patient-centered, holistic manner, using a variety of therapeutic, physiological, pharmacological, and interventional modalities. The purpose behind this approach is to reduce the reliance on opioids as a primary pain management modality, thus aiding in the reduction of potential adverse drug events related to opioids, including addiction.

The AANA shares the Task Force's concern about the increase in opioid drug use, abuse and deaths and is committed to working collaboratively to achieve comprehensive solutions to curb the opioid epidemic in the United States. Regarding the treatment of acute and chronic pain, the AANA believes these are best managed by an interdisciplinary team that actively engages the patient to diagnose and manage the patient's pain for improved well-being, functionality, and quality of life. Utilizing a patient-centered, multidisciplinary, multimodal treatment approach to pain management may reduce the reliance on opioids as a primary pain management modality, thus helping curb the over-prescribing of opioids which contributes significantly to the ongoing epidemic. As anesthesia professionals, CRNAs help to decrease or eliminate the need for opioids by collaborating with the patient and the interdisciplinary team on a comprehensive plan for pain relief known as enhanced recovery after surgery (ERAS).

Using specific protocol-driven ERAS pathways improves patient outcomes by reducing the patient's stress response to surgery, shortening the overall hospital length of stay, and accelerating the return to normal daily function. The patient's pain management plan of care begins pre-procedure and continues through post-discharge using opioid-sparing techniques such as regional anesthesia including placement of epidural catheters, targeted peripheral nerve blocks, non-pharmacologic approaches, and non-opioid based pharmacologic measures. The evidence is quite clear that careful assessment, evaluation, and treatment of acute pain, with appropriate prescribing of an opioid, may prevent access to unused opioids and development of opioid dependency and abuse. CRNAs play a critical role by ensuring proper anesthesia services management which can make a tremendous difference in terms of improving patient flow, patient safety, and cost savings.

The AANA also encourages the Task Force to push for CRNAs to be authorized as medically assisted treatment prescribers/providers to help fight the opioid crisis. Recovery for individuals struggling with opioid use disorder can be improved by expanding access to participation in patient-centered, comprehensive treatment that may include the use of medication assisted treatment (MAT). The AANA encourages broader availability of high quality MAT by increasing the number of professionals who can provide this treatment, including CRNAs.