Merriam-Webster defines zero sum as “a situation in which one person or group can win something only by causing another person or group to lose it.” In early November, I attended a lecture at the Becker’s CEO/CFO roundtable by Scott Becker. Becker is a highly respected attorney who has deep expertise and insight into healthcare delivery in this country, and he is the driving force behind Becker’s Hospital Review. He described the current and future state of healthcare as a zero-sum game—meaning that moving forward, there will only be winners or losers. Whether we all know it (or like it), CRNAs are now being directly impacted by this zero-sum environment, and I think we are extremely well positioned to be successful in this environment.

Right now, every hospital and health system CEO and CFO in this country is struggling to understand how to navigate in this extremely Volatile, Uncertain, Complexity, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment. Healthcare leaders are experiencing unprecedented downward economic pressure with reimbursement becoming increasingly more constrained and aligned with quality outcomes. Confounding and contributing to the seismic shift in the reimbursement landscape, costs (primarily in pharmaceuticals, technology, and talent) are exacerbating this already highly pressurized environment.

This VUCA environment results in approximately 30 hospital closures each year, with an anticipated acceleration in closures for the foreseeable future. Additionally, the number of independent hospitals has declined precipitously and will continue to do so because of the aforementioned factors.

When healthcare CEOs discuss what keeps them up at night, they frequently reference the following factors:

- Shrinking reimbursement
- Consolidation
- Talent acquisition (more on this later)
- Cybersecurity and the cost of technology

As I’ve stated before many times, this country has never experienced this kind of disruption in healthcare delivery, and no one really knows what healthcare delivery is going to look like in 10 years. Having said that, I’m going to make some predictions about what I think is coming down the road, and more importantly, how that is going to impact you.

**Prediction 1:** More healthcare systems are going to move services from the in-hospital setting to outpatient (e.g., surgery centers, clinics, urgent care, and primary care facilities, etc.) areas. This trend will accelerate because the outpatient environment is considerably cheaper than in-hospital care, provides a better patient experience, increases market share, and results in diversification in revenue streams. The impact on the CRNA workforce will be significant as more surgical and procedural care will occur in the outpatient setting. This will naturally present opportunities for CRNAs to compete and win contracts in an economic landscape that increasingly values quality and cost-effectiveness.

**Prediction 2:** The push to reduce variation in the provision of clinical care will accelerate. Increasingly, CRNAs and other providers will be held accountable for their clinical outcomes and the cost associated with providing clinical care. This will undoubtedly result in the proliferation of standardization protocols (e.g., Enhanced Recovery), and the earlier you recognize and adopt this philosophy, the better positioned you are going to be.

**Prediction 3:** Key decision makers (e.g., healthcare administrators, legislators, and regulators) are going to continue to aggressively explore cost reduction. As the reimbursement landscape becomes more pressurized, all players are going to have to consistently demonstrate their value to the system. The focus will increasingly be on lowering cost while simultaneously enhancing quality, which positions the profession of nurse anesthesia quite well.
Prediction 4: Advances in science and technology will rapidly transform healthcare delivery in this country. Of particular importance to our profession, advances in genomics and artificial intelligence will directly impact the way CRNAs practice anesthesia. Rather than fear this disruption, we need to embrace the inevitable and position ourselves to influence and capitalize upon these advances.

Prediction 5: As hospitals, health systems, and anesthesia groups continue to seek safety and growth opportunities through merger and acquisition (M&A) activity, more CRNAs are going to be impacted. The proliferation of M&A activity will intensify in the ambulatory surgical center space (see prediction 1), which will be the new frontier in healthcare consolidation.

Prediction 6: The supply/demand imbalance for talent in healthcare (including anesthesia professionals) is going to become increasingly more precarious. This presents significant opportunity for CRNAs (e.g., salary/benefit growth, scope of practice expansion, and modernization of anesthesia care team models), but it also presents potential threats (e.g., growth of physician-dependent anesthesia providers, encroachment of non-anesthesia providers, and limited access to care).

Change is not easy, not for anyone. However, it’s imperative for us to understand that change is coming for us whether we like it or not. It is also important to understand that change, especially the seismic change we are currently experiencing in the healthcare delivery, presents both significant opportunities and threats for our profession.

Five Ways to Celebrate National CRNA Week
January 20-26, 2019
#CRNAWEEK

1. Place an order for CRNA Week materials by visiting www.AANA.com/CRNAWeek. Here you will find posters, buttons, ink pens and much more free of charge; however, shipping and handling fees will apply. You can also order coffee mugs, baseball caps, travel mugs, and t-shirts bearing this year’s theme: Every BREATH, Every BEAT, Every Second, WE ARE THERE. Ordering deadline: January 14, 2019.

2. Change your outgoing voicemail, email signature block, text message and other communications to read “Happy CRNA Week!”

3. As part of your observance of CRNA Week, visit your state representative and educate him/her about nurse anesthetists ensuring patient access to safe, cost-effective anesthesia care to millions of Americans each year!

4. Speak at a high school or to an undergraduate nursing class about a career in nurse anesthesia. In addition, many civic organizations and senior groups are always looking for guest speakers on various topics. Visit the AANA website to find resources to help with your public speaking engagements.

5. Get out into the community! Choose an organization to volunteer your time, expertise as a healthcare provider, or to advance the mission of others. Whether you participate in your state association, partner with fellow CRNAs, or go solo, it’s a great way to celebrate your chosen profession.

See www.aana.com/crnaweekinfo for more promotional ideas.