Personal Mobile Device Use in the Operating Room

Ewa Greenier, MPH, MBA
Professional Practice Specialist

Technology is constantly evolving. Information is readily available and portable now more than ever. CRNAs and other healthcare professionals can instantly access and use information from various sources using mobile devices, such as smartphones, PDAs, and tablet computers. An increased amount of mobile technology also creates additional opportunities for distractions and interruptions to occur during patient care. Distractions and interruptions are not new in healthcare or the OR environment; yet, CRNAs must strive to avoid nonessential distractions to enhance patient safety. The AANA Scope and Standards for Nurse Anesthesia Practice emphasizes that continuous clinical observation and vigilance are the basis of safe anesthesia care. An anesthetized patient demands constant situational awareness. CRNAs must be aware of their ethical responsibility to support the safety and well being of the patients under their care. New technology may blur the lines between personal and professional tasks. Aside from the convenience of placing phone calls, mobile devices allow for immediate communication through text or email. Wireless connectivity provides instant Internet access, linking users to a myriad of magazines, e-books, television shows, social networking outlets, blogs, games, and thousands of mobile apps allowing for greater opportunity for distraction. Any inattentive behavior unrelated to patient care such as reading, texting, gaming, or using mobile technology during patient procedures should be considered a potential patient safety issue. Distractions due to the personal use of technology in the OR may have devastating effects on a patient. A recent New York Times article described an incident where a patient was left partially paralyzed because the neurosurgeon was distracted by using a wireless headset with his cell phone for personal calls during surgery. CRNAs should consider the impact that the use of mobile devices may have on provider vigilance.

A camera is a common feature on mobile technology that provides the ability to instantly take pictures and videos. Smartphones also make it extremely easy to upload pictures and videos to various social media outlets. Inappropriate use of social media can violate federal and state laws in place to protect patient privacy and confidentiality. A recent case brought to the Court of Appeals of Ohio illustrates the importance of understanding facility policies regarding use of personal mobile devices. An emergency room technician took a photo, with a personal cell phone, of an excessive amount of tape used to secure a urinary catheter, since he felt this was mistreatment of the patient. Despite his best intentions, the technician was terminated for unauthorized use of his cell phone and not following hospital policy. The court dismissed the case because the technician did not uphold the hospital’s policy on patient photography. With the advent of cameras and video capabilities on mobile devices, CRNAs must be cognizant and respectful of their patient’s rights.

Facilities may have explicitly written policies regarding the inappropriate use of personal mobile devices and employee interaction using social media. It is imperative that CRNAs understand and comply with facility policies. Inappropriate use of mobile technology may include, but is not limited to:

- Making personal, non-emergent phone calls, emails, or texts while providing direct patient care;
- Viewing nonclinical content not relevant to the immediate direct care of the patient;
- Taking and/or transmitting pictures or videos of patients via text or email, and/or posting them on social media sites, blogs, or discussion boards;
- Transmitting patient-protected health information covered by HIPAA;
- Using employer-issued technology for personal matters.

Remaining vigilant at all times of anesthetic administration and management is a critical component of the CRNA’s role in providing high-quality care and ensuring patient safety. It is encouraged that CRNAs embrace the use of new and emerging health information technology and use it to promote safe patient care. The inappropriate use of technology can cause nonessential distractions or interruptions, which in turn may lead to adverse events or near misses. CRNAs should embrace their role as leaders in the anesthesia community to raise awareness and promote education of the appropriate use of health information technology and mobile devices in the operating room.
References

---

Sharon Pearce, CRNA, MSN for Vice President

Dedicated Leader

EXPERIENCED CLINICIAN
Last seven years in office-based anesthesia
Thirteen years hospital-based anesthesia

Strength-Synergy-Stability-Support-Sharing

Nominated by: TX, KY, MN, NJ, GA, TN, DE, NC, WV, VA, IL

This paid advertisement does not signify or imply AANA endorsement of the candidate.