Assessing Your Wellness Quotient

The anesthesia process is about prevention and risk assessment. It is about preventing potential complications, discomfort, and untoward outcomes. Anesthesia providers are experts at risk assessment of patients, but often they neglect their own personal health as they pursue busy lives and careers. A major goal of the AANA Wellness Program is to provide an opportunity for members to assess their own well-being and personal health.

New Wellness Section on Website

When the AANA launches its newly redesigned website in 2006, the Wellness Program will have its own section. Both CRNAs and students are encouraged to complete an online survey included on the site, an assessment tool that can help you focus your wellness energies on the areas that matter most to you, such as stress, cardiovascular health, cancer risk, or weight management. This kind of program represents the latest thinking in wellness and health improvement.

When you complete your personal survey, you'll receive an immediate report that outlines your current health status in relationship to your age group in the general population. All data you provide in the survey remains private and confidential between the survey company and you. No individual data is shared with the AANA. Aggregate data will be reviewed for planning future wellness initiatives for the general membership.

The assessment tool will help you learn about your personal health status. The AANA Wellness Program is focused on promoting physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The assessment tool is not an end in itself but a vehicle for improvement, and a first step in your journey toward a balanced lifestyle. We hope that participating in the survey will increase your awareness of the impact that your behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs have on your health and well-being. In the future the wellness section of the website will offer members access to more tools and resources to help reach personal wellness goals and a balanced lifestyle.

Spotlighting a Balanced Lifestyle

A cultural movement in the early 1980s promoted the concept that healthy routines lead to equilibrium in one's life. Today, the importance of a balanced lifestyle is receiving a tremendous resurgence in both the medical and consumer literature and is heavily promoted in media entertainment outlets. Preventive healthcare websites, best-seller books, fast food chains focusing on nutrition, and exercise promotion campaigns are daily reminders that healthy living is in the spotlight.

Like many other healthcare professionals, nurse anesthetists work too hard, for long hours, under highly stressful conditions. CRNAs and students carry a heavy workload with little ability to control their environment, and are expected to be accessible to everyone at all times. Achieving and maintaining balance can be incredibly difficult when one considers the daily onslaught of demands and the unique set of challenges faced by anesthetists. This is especially true while also juggling multiple family demands, nurse anesthesia education, and other external activities.

Obtaining balance is an important aspect in our everyday lives. Balance is stability, from managing time correctly, to eating healthy, to being mindful of one's thinking, choices, and actions. Balance helps facilitate our busy everyday lives, and most people intuitively recognize a need to achieve balance in their daily schedule.

There are many ways to help achieve a degree of balance with which one can feel comfortable. Understanding and being mindful of your surroundings and aware of what is going on with your health encourages one to look at the whole picture about his or her health and the potential for less than optimal healthy lifestyles. For example, time management, eating right, working out regularly, getting enough sleep, and practicing ways to deal with stress enable one to achieve balance more easily.

Time Management

Most of us have felt swamped at one time or another. With hectic work schedules, family responsibilities, and social engagements, there just doesn’t seem to be enough time for everything we need and want to do. Time management
helps prioritize what is important. The first step in effectively managing time is to develop an explicit plan that should include time for yourself, your family, and your job. It is not about squeezing more into your day. It’s about managing the time you have by creating the space you need to balance all the activities. Give yourself permission to let something go.

Healthy Eating
It is common knowledge that eating well is a major component for a healthy lifestyle. However, many of us do not develop healthy eating habits, becoming either too obsessed with what we eat or not caring enough about food choices. The food pyramid can serve as a guideline, but nutritional needs vary from person to person. It is then important for each individual to find their nutritional balance, making sure that they eat the nutrients important for a normal and healthy life. The balance between carbohydrates and proteins; fats, sugars, and milk products; and vitamins and minerals is crucial for good health and good living. Information and daily reminders about healthy eating can be found in the press, on the Internet, and on television.

Getting Enough Rest
Today’s 24-hour culture is demanding and damaging to health and makes us fatigued and less productive. An appropriate amount of sleep is essential to maintaining balance. Nurse anesthetists are not exempt from the effects of fatigue and by the very nature of their work, may in fact be more susceptible. Hospitals function around the clock, and CRNAs perform their responsibilities with frequently interrupted schedules. Causes of fatigue include sleep deprivation, boredom, work overload, physical exhaustion, working excessive hours, and changes to circadian rhythms. Sleep deprivation and disturbances of circadian rhythm lead to fatigue, decreased alertness, and poor performance in the workplace, and often disturb family dynamics.

The Benefits of Exercise
Exercise helps us sleep well, gives us energy, and just generally keeps us healthier. Physical exertion, such as walking, bicycling, swimming, or organized sports activities, helps to discharge stress. Stretching, yoga, jumping rope, sit-ups, playing with children, or doing yard work are other types of therapeutic breaks you should consider during times of stress. Finally, be sure to have some fun while working or playing; a good sense of humor can keep most problems in perspective.

The First Steps in Achieving Balance
A balanced life is hard to achieve, maybe impossible. However, starting to make the smallest changes in diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management, as well as getting bad habits under control, can lead to an improved, more satisfying lifestyle. Assessing your personal wellness quotient is the first step on your journey.

Be Your Own Best Friend

The Council for Public Interest in Anesthesia (CPIA) promotes patient safety through consumer education and practitioner risk reduction strategies. AANA Director of Practice Sandra Tunajek, CRNA, DNP, is the primary staff member responsible for the CPIA’s activities and the Wellness Project, and for staffing the AANA Peer Assistance Advisors Committee. Questions and comments may be addressed to stunajek@aana.com or (847) 655-1115.

Nominations Sought for “Researcher of the Year” Award

The Researcher of the Year Award, established in 1999 by the AANA Foundation, is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the practice of anesthesia through clinical research. This award recognizes the commitment of individuals to the profession of nurse anesthesia and to the advancement of research that furthers the art of anesthesiology and results in completion of high-quality patient care through research studies.

The next deadline date for receipt of completed nomination forms is March 15, 2006. Further information can be obtained from the AANA Foundation, 222 S. Prospect Ave., Park Ridge, IL 60068-4001, (847) 655-1171.