WELLNESS MILESTONES

Moving Forward by Looking Back

Studies have shown that negative emotional states often set the stage for physical and mental disease. Research also reveals the significant impact of workplace stress, particularly among healthcare providers, including the variety of inappropriate coping mechanisms reported by practitioners. It is around these factors that AANA Wellness has developed a program for personal lifestyle change that is focused on self-responsibility with engagement of the whole person, including body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

The History of the Wellness Program
Historically, the profession was aware of the potential for misuse of drugs and alcohol. A 1962 article in the *AANA Journal* suggested addiction was an occupational hazard within the anesthesia community.

In 1983 the AANA membership put forth a resolution that recommended the formation of a task force “for the purpose of studying the impact of chemical dependency upon our profession and to be a source of positive public relations concerning chemical dependency information as it affects our members.” Implementation of the resolution led to the formation of the chemical dependency peer assistance advisors (www.AANAPeerAssistance.com).

The peer assistance advisors are volunteers who offer confidential assistance, informational support and referral resources located in most states. The ad hoc committee also maintained liaison relationships with other nursing and physician groups, monitored research efforts focused on substance abuse, and provided 24-hour coverage of the helpline.

Statistics supported the need to address the issue, and in 1993 the AANA released the video *Wearing Masks*, highlighting the negative consequences of addiction. Subsequent studies suggest that substance abuse continues to be a significant risk to anesthesia professionals (www.AANA.com/Wearing-Masks). An estimated 10 percent to 14 percent of nurse anesthetists, anesthesiologists, residents, and nurse anesthesia students suffer from this illness.

Unfortunately, the stigma and negative assumptions, along with guilt, fear, and shame often prevent healthcare professionals from seeking assistance. Stigma is defined as a sign of shame, disgrace, or discredit that sets a person apart from others. Unfortunately, society stigmatizes anyone with the word addiction attached to them. Further, nurses are more reluctant to seek help, largely due to fear of loss of license. Incredible shame and guilt leads to secrecy and isolation. Studies show that contact-based training and education targeting students may be effective in changing stigma at its basic level.

Self-Care is not Selfishness
Research shows that stress has important human costs in terms of mental and physical illness. The unique job demands of anesthesia professionals, including their responsibilities in critical situations and emergencies, enhance high levels of workplace stress. Stress may be further exacerbated by an atmosphere of hostility, emotional problems, physical disability, addiction, fatigue, and lack of control over their environment. These factors can lead to impaired health, depression, and suicide. Many providers internalize the stress as a coping strategy, which is effective for short term, but may not meet long-term needs.

Nurses are well-known for their caring attitudes and professional skills. All nurses, including CRNAs, understand and promote wellness, but many also acknowledge they should take better care of themselves. As trained caring professionals, often we think of self-care as selfish or something that we do after we have taken care of our other duties and responsibilities.

The importance of self-care emerged as a
The functional goal of the AANA Health and Wellness Program is to empower every student nurse anesthetist to focus on the needs of students. Students repeatedly put aside their own health and wellness to get through the rigors of challenging courses and clinical rotations. A 2008 survey indicated that student registered nurse anesthetists have reported experiencing symptoms weekly, such as agitation, cravings, decreased concentration and sleep disturbances. Studies also suggest the need for ongoing strategies for health and wellness builds on past efforts, it also puts the discussion on a new footing by introducing the concept of wellness as a process of changing attitudes and becoming more aware of choices that create a more successful and balanced lifestyle. It is also essential to continue to disseminate positive messages that offer a compelling challenge to misrepresentations and negative assumptions.

**Wellness Program Today**

Ten years later, have we grown in our knowledge or gained a better understanding of the why, the how, and what it means to be well? We have accomplished much in addressing the original goals, and the AANA continues to expand its resources. The first Wellness Milestones column appeared in the AANA News bulletin in 2004 and continues through today (www.aana.com/WellnessMilestones).

The Jan Stewart Memorial Wellness Lecture Series covers a wide range of well-being topics. The website provides volumes of information and education materials relating addiction, healthy eating, exercise, coping with stress, peer assistance, and topics specific to students’ concerns. The information presented strives “to address wellness factors in a manner that promotes a balanced and fulfilling personal and professional life.”

The Health and Wellness Committee also exhibits at each AANA meeting and conducts Wellness Walk/Run events. Cooperative efforts with the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Education Programs (COA) introduced a new standard mandating wellness and substance abuse education in the COA Standards for Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Education Programs. AANA now also offers a six-module educational program on wellness and chemical dependency for student nurse anesthetists (www.aana.com/WellnessCurriculum). In addition, donations to the AANA Foundation fund research studies targeted toward stress, wellness, and substance abuse issues (www.AANAFoundation.com).

While the ongoing strategies for health and wellness builds on past efforts, it also puts the discussion on a new footing by introducing the concept of wellness as a process of changing attitudes and becoming more aware of choices that create a more successful and balanced lifestyle. It is also essential to continue to disseminate positive messages that offer a compelling challenge to misrepresentations and negative assumptions.

**2014 Speaker to Share Her Story**

Twelve years after Jan Stewart’s death, the 2014 Jan Stewart Memorial Lecture Series speaker Anita Bertrand, CRNA will be the first CRNA to reveal her journey into and out of addiction. By stepping onstage in front of a national audience of her peers in Orlando, she is shining a light on an issue that impacts so many practitioners and perhaps is helping to reduce the stigma associated with this disease. Anita’s lecture, “Making Lemonade: One CRNA’s Story of Addiction and Recovery,” will be filmed and added to the AANA Health and Wellness resources to provide ongoing education for widespread awareness of nurse anesthetists’ occupational risk of addiction.

To donate to support future speakers in the series, please visit the Foundation Donation Page at www.aana.com/give. Then select the Jan Stewart Fund from the designation dropdown.

In 2004, Ms. Stewart’s daughter implored us to “grant each other permission to take care of each other.” We, as a profession, have an obligation to be good stewards of this legacy, to ensure that it will endure and flourish well into the future.

**Resources**


**If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.**

*Henry Ford*