



Sandra Tunajek, CRNA, DNP
Executive Secretary
Council for Public Interest
in Anesthesia

Tapping into Wellness Resources

Self-assessment and Awareness

Have you ever wondered how healthy your lifestyle really is? How fit you are? You may have an idea that your lifestyle is not as healthy as you or your physician would like, but how do you know? Perhaps you have tried to buy a book on wellness or checked out the vast multitude of information on the Internet. Or, perhaps you simply put off thinking about it. You're busy, or you don't have time or the energy after a stressful workday.

Do you think about where your choices will lead you? Will it be toward a long, healthy life, or a short, miserable one?

CRNAs know that our modern environment has the potential to expose us to an assortment of hazards that may cause many different health problems. They acknowledge that good health begins with a thorough evaluation of current health habits. Unfortunately, for multiple reasons nurse anesthetists and other healthcare workers tend to neglect having a thorough health examination and leave potentially serious diseases undetected and uncorrected.

Like many Americans, CRNAs feel overwhelmed at the amount of information available regarding what to eat, what not to eat, how to exercise, and how to avoid contracting diseases. These components include family and personal history, gender, age, diet and exercise patterns, alcohol and drug intake, smoking, daily risk and stress factors, and attitude concerning individual health risk. Although you cannot do anything about your family history, gender, or age, you can control other aspects of your lifestyle. The more you manage, the greater your wellness quotient, the better your health.

The AANA Wellness Program is designed to encourage nurse anesthetists and their families to attend to their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs as a way of ensuring safe, high quality services to the patients for whom our members provide care. Sufficient self care prevents harm to patients as well as detrimental effects on your personal quality of life. Wellness is not only the absence of illness but awareness

and understanding of all the components that make up a well individual.

Establish your Baseline

Your own wellness can really only be defined by you. To improve your well-being, you need to have a baseline idea of how well you are. To assist CRNAs in determining their personal wellness quotient, the AANA has created a direct link to access a *confidential* wellness assessment tool. The health assessment is available to members at www.realage.com/reg/regassess.aspx?mod=LONGFORM&cbr=AANA01. Since 1999, more than 12 million people have taken the RealAge test, which is widely accepted as the gold standard for measuring individual health status. The assessment tool is integral to the Wellness website, a component of the soon to be launched AANA website redesign. The Wellness site will be further developed to cover issues such as physical, mental, and emotional wellness and a balanced lifestyle, as well as many general health related topics, resources, and wellness-enhancement suggestions.

Michael Roizen, MD, a member of the AANA Blue Ribbon Panel on Wellness, created the assessment tool based on scientific research that has increasingly shown that certain health choices can slow and perhaps even reverse the rate of aging. Even choices made late in life make a difference. RealAge is the biological age of your body, based on lifestyle, genetics, and medical history. Depending on how well you take care of yourself, your RealAge might be years younger—or older—than the calendar indicates. Although based on scientific studies, the results are provided as information and are not a substitute for professional medical care. Available 24 hours a day seven days a week, take it today in the privacy of your home or office. Learn what lifestyle changes might produce significant health improvement and a better quality of life.

Wellness is dynamic and uniquely defined by each individual. It changes with age, time and circumstances. The AANA wellness concept is focused on the idea that the mind, body, spirit, and relationships are all interrelated and interdependent. The RealAge assessment tool is a key component in the AANA Wellness Program. As data is accumulated, the AANA agreement with RealAge is designed to report aggregate data

concerning general CRNA wellness as feedback to the Council on Public Interest in Anesthesia (CPIA). The data will be used to determine future educational projects, the promotion of wellness endeavors, and enhancement of CRNA awareness of healthy lifestyles. The CPIA goal is to help you learn more about the health risks you might be taking each day and encourage you to improve your overall sense of wellness by reinforcing the health-enhancing habits you may already practice and to improve the areas that need it.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Are you aware of employee assistance programs (EAPs)? Do you have access to an employee assistance program in the facility where you are employed? Did you know that EAPs offer employers and employees assistance in meeting various challenges? Services include mental health counseling, assistance in overcoming workplace trauma, consultation for stress and coping mechanisms, and advice on professional wellness and safety. In most cases, broad-based services are available to assist you or a family member when dealing with personal, family and work-related issues. The programs allow employees and eligible family members free and confidential assistance to help them deal with transitions in the workplace, critical incident debriefing, death and serious illness counseling, violence, anger management, sexual harassment, coping and stress management, substance abuse, and in many cases, financial and legal assistance. In all circumstances, communication with an EAP is confidential. *Your right to privacy is strictly protected.*

Personal problems can affect the lives of employees both at home and at work. Employers commonly offer a comprehensive program that helps employees resolve personal problems that may have an adverse impact on their work performance, conduct, health, and well-being. EAPs provide professional and compassionate assistance to both employers and employees when they have experienced serious workplace accidents, crimes, or employee deaths. Employers of every size and type are investing in the programs as a result of the stress our fast-paced and ever-changing world places on our workplaces and individual health.

Of particular interest to nurse anesthetists are those programs that provide critical incident debriefing and access to substance abuse and addiction counseling. Critical incident debriefing gives those who have experienced a traumatic event the opportunity to discuss their feelings and thoughts and identifies personal and profes-

sional resources to assist in the healing process. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is well recognized as a consequence of malpractice complaints. One report from the American Medical Association (AMA) indicates that 96 percent of all physicians who are sued suffer some form of emotional distress with demonstrated symptoms. Studies show that individuals confronting the litigation process feel fear, anger, shame, denial, hurt, disappointment, disillusionment, isolation, frustration, vulnerability, and that they are being unjustly persecuted. Guilt is a common response, even if the practitioner has rendered faultless care.

Anesthetists may question their own competence or may become ill, withdrawn, or depressed. The CRNA may experience a broad range of reactions including deterioration of job performance, personality change, grief reactions, insomnia, decreased sex drive, loss of appetite, and an overwhelming sense of failure and humiliation. Through EAPs, privileged communications are possible, and professional counseling and mechanisms to ease the stress are readily accessible for the practitioner.

Alcohol and drug abuse is a significant problem in the United States. Chemical dependency is a treatable, yet potentially fatal, progressive illness that affects millions of Americans, particularly those who work in high-stress situations. The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that approximately 13.4 million people have an alcohol problem, and more than 3 million have abused or are dependent on prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

The emotional consequences of drug and alcohol abuse cannot be minimized. These substances cause personality changes that contribute to problems in dealing with families and co-workers. These changes lead to psychological problems that disrupt effectiveness on the job, reduce motivation, cause legal and financial problems, and threaten the life of the individual. EAP programs provide confidential resources and professionally certified providers who are experienced in assessment, early intervention and referral, identification of counseling and support services, and promoting preventive education to employees.

Workplace-related problems caused by use of alcohol or drugs can be corrected, and individuals can resume productive careers by successfully completing a rehabilitation program. Further, while the individual is not protected as an "individual with a disability" under the Americans

continues on p. 24

Anesthesia College Bowl

Each school is encouraged to submit one student to be selected at random for participation in the 17th annual Anesthesia College Bowl, which will be held during the 2006 AANA Annual Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio. If you wish to be a contestant on one of the teams, your application is due by April 15. Applications can be obtained from your program director or by contacting the Education Department, AANA, 222 S. Prospect Ave., Park Ridge, IL 60068-4001, (847) 692-7050, ext 1165. Packets will also be available on the AANA's Student Web Page at www.aana.com.

Tapping into Wellness Resources continued from page 23

with Disabilities Act (ADA), persons addicted to drugs, but who are no longer using drugs illegally and are receiving treatment for drug addiction or who have been rehabilitated successfully, are protected by the ADA from discrimination on the basis of past drug addiction (EEOC, 1992). More importantly, such programs are effective and reduce the risk of discipline or adverse action.

Wellness is an active, lifelong process of becoming aware of choices and making decisions toward a more balanced and fulfilling life. Wellness involves choices about your life and your priorities that determine your lifestyle. Establishing a starting point, a baseline wellness score, and knowing where to access resources, as

well as becoming actively engaged in improving your well-being, can lead to a sustained balance in your health and promotes better patient care.

You can improve your wellness!

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 all the CPIA activities and the Wellness Project as well as the staffing for the AANA Peer Assistance Advisors Committee. Questions and comments may be addressed to stunajek@aana.com or (847) 655-1115. 