Travel Can Be Challenging to Your Wellness

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A healthy lifestyle is one that is full of healthy choices and behaviors. It helps us maintain good physical and mental health, promotes energy, and ultimately helps us live longer. In our profession, healthy behaviors, resilience, and effective coping mechanisms for managing stress, can mitigate unhealthy choices such as alcohol, drug abuse, and chemical dependency. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be a challenge when an anesthesia professional is on the road for meetings.

Extended hours on an airplane, hectic agendas and long meetings with colleagues are the trademarks of professional travel. Time zone changes, hotel cuisine, and sedentary sessions can interrupt sleep and healthy, active home routines. Through the work of the Health and Wellness committee (H&W), one of the features of the AANA’s wellness program is to offer options to participate with other CRNAs and student registered nurse anesthetists in fitness activities, whether formally or informally at AANA meetings.

Going the Distance

Our formal event is the Fun 5K Wellness Walk/Run held each year during Annual Meeting. This summer, as dawn arose along San Francisco Harbor in view of the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island, over 400 runners and walkers covered the bayside route. The year 2012 marks the seventh year that the popular walk/run has provided an opportunity to exercise, make new friends, and just have fun. The faces in the photos tell the story!

In addition to the physical and social benefits of the organized walk/run, CRNAs showed they were going the distance changing lives locally and globally with the international patient safety initiative of the Lifebox Foundation as the beneficiary of the proceeds. Thanks to generous support from 2012 Walk/Run Elite Sponsor CNA, the enthusiastic participation of individual CRNAs, and the organizations (see box on page 35) that joined in “backing CRNA Wellness,” the AANA contribution was $9,200! This will provide durable, audible, rechargeable pulse oximeters for 36 locations where patients currently do not benefit from this essential monitor, closing the pulse oximetry gap.

CRNAs can be proud to know that this effort fulfills the AANA vision to be “a preeminent professional association for healthcare and patient safety” influencing the care of not only the patients we personally anesthetize, but also patients in underserved areas. For more about this story and lots more photos see: http://www.aana.com/resources2/health-wellness/Pages/Wellness-Activities-at-AANA-Meetings.aspx

An informal tradition at all AANA meetings is to invite attendees to join an early morning group of walkers or runners. It’s easier to get going in the morning when you have someone to meet. Yet, because we are all unique individuals, your personal wellness during travel can be pursued in whatever way fits your needs and abilities best; this is not necessarily always an organized physical activity—for example, a meditation break or nap in your room, visiting a local attraction, attending a religious service, use of the hotel fitness center or pool, laughing with friends, etc.
Educating and Motivating

Educational sessions can also be informational and motivational to bolster your well-being during and after a meeting. The Annual Meeting in San Francisco served up two inspirational sessions. Author Chris Crowley, the ninth speaker in the Jan Stewart Memorial series, informed and entertained as he made us all feel we could improve our quality of life, have more fun, and avert the preventable deterioration of aging with healthy lifestyle changes.

H&W, in collaboration with the Peer Assistance Advisors Committee, select the Jan Stewart speaker and the H&W track speakers each year to present an aspect in the myriad of wellness related topics.

We commend the Program Committee’s choice of Aron Ralston as the keynote speaker. His moving narrative touched on yet another dimension of overall wellness—the spirit. Ralston inspired members with his true story of triumph over physical and mental adversity by showing us how to “turn your boulders into blessings” in reference to the boulder that crushed his arm, but not his courageous spirit.

As not all CRNAs and student nurse anesthetists can attend national meetings, we post resources online for state associations to Join the Wellness Movement! Be it simple or grand, there are lots of ideas and informational materials to infuse wellness into your professional time at state association meetings. We encourage members to volunteer and get involved in this movement in your state, as well as in your workplace or nurse anesthesia program. For more information, go to www.AANAWellness.com and follow the link in the left hand column to “State Health and Wellness Resources.”

Goals

There are several important goals for promoting health and wellness at all AANA meetings:

- To encourage all nurse anesthesia professionals to practice good health behaviors.
- To bring opportunities for joy into meetings and travel.
- To raise awareness of:
  - The professional risk for chemical dependency and addiction,
  - The signs and behaviors to recognize when a colleague is impaired by addiction, and once identified, to utilize
  - The availability of the Peer Assistance Support network for help (see www.AANAPeerAssistance.com).

Where ever your professional travels take you, staying healthy while on the road, sitting on planes or in meetings, and eating in restaurants takes a conscious commitment to stay well. Being a part of the AANA, an organization that cares about the health of members, patients, and our profession means CRNAs and SRNAs can travel well while participating fully in professional activities.

Thank you…

To the following seven state associations and Active Professional Conferences who joined in “backing CRNA wellness:”

California Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Florida Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Kentucky Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Michigan Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Missouri Association of Nurse Anesthetists
New York State Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Texas Association of Nurse Anesthetists, Inc.

In addition, the Delaware Association of Nurse Anesthetists donated $250 directly to Lifebox, which will fund one needed pulse oximeter.