

2025 Ira Gunn Award for Outstanding Professional Advocacy Winner
Shannon Allen, DNAP, CRNA, FAANA

As a young and impressionable critical care nurse, I worked in a rural community in New Mexico and took notice of the certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) who would come in to stabilize patients needing transfer to a higher care facility. The physicians called in CRNAs to perform life saving measures, preparing patients for the transfer by helicopter. I was mesmerized by the CRNAs and decided to follow in their footsteps, which meant I would have to leave my family and travel to another state to gain a degree in anesthesia, just as many NM nurses had done before me.

After several decades as a CRNA working independently, I saw firsthand the impact CRNAs had on our state. We provided safe, passionate care for our patients and had the trust of our teams and patients. New Mexico CRNAs cared for families during their happiest moments, such as placing epidurals for births and during their most difficult times such as providing pain management for injuries and providing care for loved ones facing end of life battles. It was important we remove barriers for our profession, and we worked together to put independent practice into our statute so we could continue to be the solution to anesthesia care our state depended on.

Our team worked together to get our first CRNA program off the ground so our best nurses could earn their degree in our home state, ensuring retention of our graduates, which is crucial for our underserved areas. We are leaving a solid foundation for our future CRNAs, and a legacy of changing the landscape in New Mexico healthcare.