The Role of the AANA Education Committee in Developing Education Standards

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The purpose of this column is to describe the involvement over time of the AANA Education Committee in the development of education standards for nurse anesthetists. Collaboration between the Education Committee, Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs, and nurse anesthesia community of interest in developing quality doctoral standards is discussed.

Keywords: AANA Education Committee, history of nurse anesthesia education, Nurse Anesthesia Education Standards.

History of the Education Standards for Nurse Anesthesia Programs
There has been long-standing interplay between our professional organization and its designated body responsible for setting education standards for nurse anesthetists. Proof of this collaboration can be found in a visit to the Archives at the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) and viewing the historical files. The story is recorded in old bulletins and newsletters that reveal how early leaders in the National Association of Nurse Anesthetists (NANA, later renamed the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists) set education standards, approved curricula, and began inspecting schools before World War II. NANA assigned responsibility for these projects to the first Educational Committee (later to be named the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists) set education standards, approved curricula, and began inspecting schools before World War II. 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Education Committee is to provide direction for programs associated with educating future nurse anesthetists, as well as to support nurse anesthesia educators. Other purposes include reviewing and recommending changes in the standards and guidelines for nurse anesthesia educational programs and maintaining open lines of communication with all aspects of nurse anesthesia education including all stakeholders.

Members of the AANA Education Committee hold appointed and elected positions. Appointed members are selected by the president-elect of the AANA and serve for a 1-year term. Two committee members are elected by the attendees at the Assembly of School Faculty. They serve alternating 2-year terms. Additionally, 1 committee member is an associate student member who is elected by the student population attending the AANA Annual Meeting. He or she serves for a 1-year term. The current AANA Education Committee is comprised of nurse anesthesia program directors, assistant program directors, and a student member. Many of the members have been in nurse anesthesia education for more than 10 years and come from diverse educational backgrounds.

Education Committee’s Responsibility for Standards Revision Process

The AANA Education Committee is charged with fulfilling the AANA’s strategic plan related to education as set forth by the AANA Board of Directors (BOD) and the professional association bylaws. In addition, the Education Committee’s recommendations and initiatives should be developed through reflective consideration of the requirements of external educational regulations for accrediting agencies. Efforts to meet the educational goals of the profession and regulators often necessitate coordinated undertakings of both the Education Committee and COA, with each group assuming its appropriate responsibility and also maintaining expected levels of autonomy.

The current 2004 Standards for Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (COA Standards) are in effect with the last update in January 2012. The timeline for a major revision to the COA Standards is set forth by the policies of the COA and is implemented by various responsible parties including the AANA Education Committee, COA, and SRTF. In February 2012, the AANA Education Committee received the first draft of the COA Doctoral Standards for Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (Doctoral Standards). The Education Committee began work on the first draft of the Doctoral Standards in response to a call for comments following that February release. Education Committee members were asked to share concerns and comments of support and make suggestions on the draft standards, definitions, and appendices via an online survey. This survey was sent to each Education Committee member for comment, and all survey results were reviewed by the committee collectively before sharing them with the SRTF. The results of this survey were reported by the SRTF to the COA at its May 2012 meeting.

The draft Doctoral Standards will continue to be presented at all major AANA meetings with focus groups and hearings throughout the multiyear process. Comments and suggestions from all interested parties are encouraged and form the basis of the second draft of the standards. The accepted first draft and proposed second draft of the Doctoral Standards will be forwarded to the Education Committee for comment and input. Additional recommendations and suggestions for revision will be requested through a public hearing held by
the AANA Education Committee at the Assembly of School Faculty. Other venues for comment on the second draft of the Standards will be the responsibility of the COA that may include announcements in the AANA NewsBulletin and via direct correspondence to communities of interest.

Public hearings for the Draft Standards hosted by the AANA Education Committee and COA are planned for the AANA Mid-Year Assembly and at the AANA Assembly of School Faculty during the AANA Annual Meeting in 2013. At these hearings, the second draft with proposed changes will be presented for review and recommendations. Following completion of all analyses, the SRTF will prepare the third draft of the Doctoral Standards. After the culmination of several years of review and public vetting, a process open to all interested parties, the SRTF will propose a final draft of the Doctoral Standards for review by the COA. It is important to note that during this entire process, the SRTF may provide assistance to the AANA Education Committee and COA at various stages in drafting and presentation of the COA Standards.

The implementation phase for the Doctoral Standards is slated to begin in 2014 with the preparation and adoption of the new COA doctoral education standards. The implementation process is designed such that it occurs over the next year and includes the initial distribution to nurse anesthesia program administrators and other appropriate groups and/or individuals. Additionally, the newly adopted standards are proposed to be introduced through an orientation by the COA at the AANA Assembly of School Faculty in February 2014, which is hosted by the AANA Education Committee.

Summary
The AANA Education Committee, and the membership of the profession it represents, has a strong and ever-present role in the establishment, presentation, public vetting, and ongoing modification of the education standards that govern the educational programs responsible for preparing individuals to enter the profession. These responsibilities are carried out in collaboration with the COA, which is responsible to the public to establish and enforce educational quality relative to nurse anesthesia education. Both parties actively participate in the standards revision process by providing review and recommendations for consideration. While all parts of the process are essential to the successful outcome of a major standards revision, ultimately the final decisions lie with the COA. As a result, the 2 fundamental reasons for accreditation are preserved: (1) to ensure quality assessment, and (2) to assist in quality improvement. While accreditation cannot, nor is it reasonable to expect that it should guarantee the quality of each individual graduate, it can provide reasonable assurance of the context and quality of the education that is extended to students enrolled in an accredited program.

Involvement in revising education standards for the profession is an avenue for participation of the AANA Education Committee in establishing the requirements for entry to practice preparation. The goal is a meaningful contribution of the profession by bringing together practitioners, educators, students, and the communities of interest in an activity directed toward improving professional preparation and practice.

REFERENCES

AUTHORS
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