

No Evidence of Access Issue for Anesthesia Services in VA *Preserve Safe Care for our Nation's Veterans*

While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizes that access to primary care services continues to be a barrier for Veterans, this does not apply to the surgical anesthesia setting.

VA has done extensive research on provider types in shortage. There is no systemic shortage of anesthesia providers in VA and Veterans deserve safe, physician-led anesthesia care

- In a December 2015 publication “**VHA 2015 Mission Critical Occupations Report,**” that **“identifies the highest ranking ten mission critical (hard-to-fill) occupations (“top 10”) in VHA, anesthesia was not one of the top ten occupations facing a critical shortage.** Top physician specialties in shortage include psychiatry, primary care and gastroenterology physicians. **The document includes no information to support a lack of access to anesthesia services.**
- The VA’s September 1, 2015 analysis of staffing capabilities, “Assessment B (Health Care Capabilities)” of the “**Independent Assessment of the Health Care Delivery Systems and Management Processes of the Department of Veterans Affairs,**” reviewed provider types in shortage and did not list physician anesthesiologists as among the 12 identified in shortage. “In our interviews, multiple respondents identified 12 specialties and provider types with shortages: mental health, urology, orthopedic surgery, hospitalist, physical therapy, eye care (ophthalmology and optometry), audiology, ear-nose-and-throat, dermatology, vascular surgery, general surgery, and neurology. “ (Assessment, pg. 87). While the Assessment indicates there may be delay for colonoscopy services, it states this is due to a shortage of gastroenterologists, not anesthesia providers.
- On the government-run jobs database, www.USAJobs.gov, there are only a handful of unfilled positions for physician anesthesiologists. Veterans have no barriers to anesthesia care within VA and their access would not be improved by lowering their standard of care and removing physician-led anesthesia.

Due to no access issue, the surgical/anesthesia setting should be excluded from the VHA Nursing Handbook to ensure Veterans receive the safe, high-quality health care they have earned and deserve.