

VA Preserves Safe Care for Veterans

Reverses Proposal to Replace Physician Anesthesiologists with Nurses for Veterans' Anesthesia

The American Society of Anesthesiologists® (ASA®) commends the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for its decision to reverse its proposal to replace physician anesthesiologists with nurses in VA health care facilities. If implemented, the proposal would have fundamentally changed the delivery of surgical anesthesia care for Veterans.

In 2013, the VA Office of Nursing Services (ONS) proposed the "Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN)" rule, formerly known as the "VHA Nursing Handbook" under which the role of APRNs would be expanded in VA. After extensive study and consideration by VA and two public comment periods with a record level of engagement, VA issued a Final Rule on December 13, 2016 that maintained safe, high-quality physician-led anesthesia care in VA facilities.

If implemented, the VA ONS proposal would have abandoned physician-led, team-based surgical anesthesia care, the current consensus model of care in VA, and replaced it with a nurse-only model of care. VA's own surgical anesthesia experts, the VA Chiefs of Anesthesiology, informed VA leadership that the new policy "would directly compromise patient safety and limit our ability to provide quality care to Veterans."

A bipartisan group of more than 140 Congressional representatives and senators contacted VA to express concerns about the negative impact of the proposed change on Veteran patient safety. During the proposed and final rule comment periods, VA received a record number of comments, including more than 125,000 comments in support of preserving physician-led anesthesia care more than one third of which came from Veterans and their families. Similarly, prominent national Veterans' organizations expressed concerns to VA leadership about the implications of the proposal for care to Veterans.

In the Final Rule, VA recognized the patient safety implications and excluded nurse anesthetists from the policy, preserving physician-led anesthesia care for our nation's Veterans. This decision is a win for Veterans and safe, high-quality care. This decision is put in jeopardy by H.R. 1783, the "Improving Veterans Access to Quality Care Act," which ignores the thorough debate from the public comment periods and puts Veterans' health and safety at risk.

KEY POINTS:

- Led by then-Under Secretary for Health David Shulkin, M.D., VA upheld the standard of care for Veterans and maintained the proven model of physician-led, team-based surgical anesthesia care after a record level of public engagement from Veterans and other stakeholders.
- VA patients have complex medical conditions that pose a heightened risk of complications during surgery.
- The team-based model of care has provided excellent outcomes, and ensures that Veterans will have access to a physician anesthesiologist if an emergency or complication occurs. Independent studies inform policy makers of better outcomes when physicians are involved in anesthesia.
- There is no shortage of physician anesthesiologists or nurse anesthetists in VA, according to the 2015 Mission Critical Occupations Report and the September 2015 VA OIG Staffing Shortage report.
- H.R. 1783 would ignore the thorough debate and record-breaking level of public comment on this proposal, putting Veterans' health and safety at risk.
- Find more information about this issue at asahq.org/SafeVACare or SafeVACare.org.

REQUEST:

To ensure that the health and lives of Veterans are not put at risk, please withhold your support from H.R. 1783 and ensure VA continues to provide physician-led, team-based surgical anesthesia care in VA medical facilities.



When Seconds Count...
Physician Anesthesiologists Save Lives.®

To learn more about patient-centered, physician-led anesthesia care and the medical specialty of anesthesiology, please visit www.asahq.org/WhenSecondsCount