



American Society of
Anesthesiologists[®]

May 1, 2021

Board of Directors
c/o Humayun J. Chaudhry, DO, President and Chief Executive Officer
Federation of State Medical Boards
2101 L. Street NW, Suite 404
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Board of Directors and Humayun J. Chaudhry, DO, President and Chief Executive Officer:

Medical title manipulation is a growing concern across health care and medical specialties. Within the specialty of anesthesiology, the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) has grave concerns about the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists' (AANA's) efforts to confuse and mislead the public and patients by misappropriating physician descriptors and medical titles.

ASA values our nurse anesthetist colleagues and their contributions as important members of the anesthesia care delivery team. We recognize their service to patients, anesthesia groups and departments, and hospitals and surgery centers. We also recognize that many nurse anesthetists value working closely with us to provide patients the safest and highest-quality care.

However, AANA is actively challenging the ethical principle that patients must have full knowledge and understanding of the education, training, skills, and experience of the health care professionals providing their care. Similarly, health care staff in the clinical setting must be entirely informed of the education, skills, and training of their colleagues. AANA's recent actions regarding the descriptor "anesthesiologist" are wholly inconsistent with both our patients' and professional colleagues' best interests. Their actions are creating discord in the care setting and confusing patients, ultimately risking patient safety.

Specifically, please be aware AANA has written to the National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA) and the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (Council on Accreditation) to formally request that the two organizations:

- "... define CRNA as 'certified registered nurse anesthetist' and 'certified registered nurse anesthesiologist,' and to recognize the terms as conceptually interchangeable and synonymous just like the AANA."
- Update their documents "... to change the term 'anesthesiologist' when being used to refer to a physician to 'physician anesthesiologist,' and when being used to refer to a dentist to 'dentist anesthesiologist.'"

Ever since the word was first coined, the descriptor “anesthesiologist” has specifically been used to differentiate specially-trained physicians from non-physician anesthetists. AANA is now intentionally trying to blur that distinction in the minds of the unsuspecting public. Additionally, AANA is changing its organization’s name to adopt the term “anesthesiology,” which falsely suggests nurses are medical doctors and leaders of the science and study of anesthesiology.

The Federation of State Medical Boards is noted for its role in supporting “its member boards as they fulfill their mandate of protecting the public’s health, safety and welfare through the proper licensing, disciplining, and regulation of physicians and, in most jurisdictions, other health care professionals.” Your voice on medical title misappropriation and misuse is important and meaningful.

We respectfully ask that you issue a statement affirming the descriptors “anesthesiology” and “anesthesiologist” should only be used to describe physicians and that the derivative terms “nurse anesthesiology” and “nurse anesthesiologist” are misleading and should not be recognized or used. This has profound implications for patient safety and inaction risks confusion and discord in the clinical setting.

The American Board of Medical Specialties, the American Medical Association, and the American Board of Anesthesiology agree anesthesiology is a medical specialty and professionals who refer to themselves as “anesthesiologists” must hold a license to practice medicine. As you may know, the New Hampshire Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the New Hampshire Board of Medicine to limit the use of the term “anesthesiologist” to individuals licensed to practice medicine.

ASA and FSMB share a commitment to quality, the important role of physicians, and their unique training and education that ensures the care and safety of the public. We urge you to reject AANA’s request and issue a statement affirming appropriate descriptors and titles. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beverly K Philip MD".

Beverly K. Philip, MD, FACA, FASA
President, American Society of Anesthesiologists

Cc: Paul Pomerantz, FACHE
Chief Executive Officer, American Society of Anesthesiologists