



The Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) **Brad Stelflug, CRNA, MSN, APRN, FAAPM**

In my nine years of delivering anesthesia care in Indiana, I have learned that many Hoosiers have no idea what a nurse anesthetist is despite the fact that nurse anesthetists have been providing safe anesthesia to patients for over 150 years in the United States, and since 1937 in Indiana. As a practicing nurse anesthetist, I am excited about this opportunity to do and have information about Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) and how they benefit the people of Indiana.

What is a CRNA?

CRNAs are advanced practice registered nurses who specialize in anesthesia care. Board certified nationally and credentialed by local hospitals or ambulatory surgery centers to practice, CRNAs are educated and qualified to perform general anesthesia, epidural and spinal anesthesia, peripheral nerve blocks, and moderate to deep sedation. CRNAs assess the state of their patients' health before surgical or other procedures and then develop the best anesthetic plan for their patients in cooperation with the patient and the surgeon. The trademark of CRNAs is staying with their patients throughout the entire procedure, constantly monitoring their vital signs and modifying their anesthetic to ensure maximum safety and comfort. CRNAs are trained to provide immediate care to any patient who has an adverse reaction to the anesthesia or the procedure, or if a patient's health deteriorates to the point of needing intervention.

Are CRNAs safe?

Absolutely! CRNAs safely administer more than 34 million anesthetics to patients in the United States each year. CRNAs are the primary anesthesia professionals in rural America, enabling healthcare facilities in these medically underserved areas to provide patient access to surgical, obstetrical, pain management, and trauma stabilization services. In some states CRNAs are the sole providers in nearly 100 percent of rural hospitals. In the U.S. Military, all anesthetic is administered by CRNAs. CRNAs are qualified and permitted by state laws and regulations to practice in every state of the nation. Numerous research studies confirm that CRNAs provide access to safe, cost-effective anesthesia services to millions of patients each year. The landmark study titled "No Harm Found When Nurse Anesthetists Work Without Supervision by Physicians" (*Health Affairs*, 2010) confirmed that the anesthesia care provided by CRNAs is of the safe and highest quality care (second to none.) As of today, 17 states believe so strong in the safety of CRNAs that they have opted out of the Medicare physician supervision requirement for CRNAs; additionally more than 50% of all states do not require physician supervision of nurse anesthetists in their state laws and regulations.

How can CRNAs help Indiana?

Nurse anesthesia was established in the late 1800s in response to the growing need surgeons had for anesthetists. Today there are more than 47,000 nurse anesthetists nationwide who provide cost-effective, high-quality anesthesia care that is essential to America's healthcare system. Currently, Indiana underutilizes CRNAs. Neighboring states have a CRNA to population ratio of 1:4,600 to



1:8,500. Indiana has a CRNA to population ratio of 1:23,500. With the current anesthesia provider shortage in America, now is the time for Indiana's health institutions to consider hiring more CRNAs.

CRNAs fill a variety of roles in Indiana. In many rural areas, CRNAs are the sole providers of anesthesia care in local hospitals. CRNAs also work in teams with anesthesiologists. Sometimes in these teams CRNAs work independent of the anesthesiologists, and in other settings they are supervised by the anesthesiologists. The flexibility of CRNAs makes them a great solution to the nationwide anesthesia provider shortage.

Education

CRNAs are registered nurses who earn their Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing (BSN) and, after attaining a year or more of experience in an acute-care setting, become eligible to apply for acceptance to a nurse anesthesia educational program. The classroom education of nurse anesthetists includes anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, pathophysiology, and more; clinical training includes performing hundreds of anesthesia procedures across a broad spectrum. Educational programs are 24 to 36 months long and graduates receive either a master's or doctoral degree (DNP). By 2025, all nurse anesthetist programs will be at the doctoral level. Individuals who have completed their education and training are still not considered to be CRNAs until they pass the National Certification Examination (NCE). After becoming a CRNA, the practitioner must complete a mandatory 40 hours of continuing education and fulfill other requirements every two years. This educational regiment helps ensure that nurse anesthetists continue to deliver high-quality anesthesia services combined with personal concern for the health and welfare of their patients.

Currently there are no nurse anesthesia programs in Indiana. Anyone interested in becoming a CRNA can visit www.aana.com to locate schools and advice. The nearest programs to Indiana are: Chicago area (Rush University, Rosalind Franklin University, and North Shore University at DePaul); Detroit area (University of Michigan Flint, University of Detroit, and Wayne State University); Cleveland (Cleveland Clinic); Cincinnati (University of Cincinnati); and Madisonville, Kentucky (Murray State University).

Serving outside of Indiana

CRNAs have been the main providers of anesthesia care to U.S. military personnel on the front lines since WWI, including current conflicts in the Middle East. CRNAs currently serve in the Air Force, Army, Navy, and the Public Health Service.

CRNAs also serve on medical mission trips to impoverished nations. I have personally been on eight mission trips to Guatemala and Haiti. There are many opportunities for CRNAs who want to volunteer their services to nations less fortunate than ours.

Resources: American Association of Nurse Anesthetists www.aana.com
Indiana Association of Nurse Anesthetists www.inana.org.