

STATEMENT ON THE ANESTHESIA CARE TEAM

(Approved by the ASA House of Delegates on October 26, 1982, and last amended on October 18, 2006)

Anesthesiology is the practice of medicine including, but not limited to, preoperative patient evaluation, anesthetic planning, intraoperative and postoperative care and the management of systems and personnel that support these activities. In addition, anesthesiology involves perioperative consultation, the prevention and management of untoward perioperative patient conditions, the treatment of acute and chronic pain, and the care of critically ill patients. This care is personally provided by or directed by the anesthesiologist.

In the interest of patient safety and quality of care, the American Society of Anesthesiologists believes that the involvement of an anesthesiologist in the perioperative care of every patient is optimal. Almost all anesthesia care is either provided personally by an anesthesiologist or is provided by a nonphysician anesthesia provider directed by an anesthesiologist. The latter mode of anesthesia delivery is called the Anesthesia Care Team and involves the delegation of monitoring and appropriate tasks by the physician to nonphysicians. Such delegation should be specifically defined by the anesthesiologist and should also be consistent with state law or regulations and medical staff policy. Although selected tasks of overall anesthesia care may be delegated to qualified members of the Anesthesia Care Team, overall responsibility for the Anesthesia Care Team and the patients' safety rests with the anesthesiologist.

Core Members of the Anesthesia Care Team

The Anesthesia Care Team includes both physicians and nonphysicians. Each member of the team has an obligation to accurately identify themselves and other members of the team to patients and family members. Anesthesiologists should not permit the misrepresentation of nonphysician personnel as resident physicians or practicing physicians. The nomenclature below is appropriate terminology for this purpose.

Physicians:

ANESTHESIOLOGIST – director of the anesthesia care team - a **physician** licensed to practice medicine who has successfully completed a training program in anesthesiology accredited by the ACGME, the American Osteopathic Association or equivalent organizations.

ANESTHESIOLOGY FELLOW— an **anesthesiologist** enrolled in a training program to obtain additional education in one of the subdisciplines of anesthesiology.

ANESTHESIOLOGY RESIDENT – a **physician** enrolled in an accredited anesthesiology residency program.

Nonphysicians:

NURSE ANESTHETIST – a **registered nurse** who has satisfactorily completed an accredited nurse anesthesia training program.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST ASSISTANT – a **health professional** who has satisfactorily completed an accredited anesthesiologist assistant training program.

STUDENT NURSE ANESTHETIST – a **registered nurse** who is enrolled in an accredited nurse anesthesia training program.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST ASSISTANT STUDENT – a **health professions graduate student** who has satisfied the required coursework for admission to an accredited school of medicine and is enrolled in an accredited anesthesiologist assistant training program.

Although not considered core members of the Anesthesia Care Team, other health care professionals make important contributions to the perianesthetic care of the patient (see **Addendum A**).

Definitions

ANESTHESIA CARE TEAM – Anesthesiologists supervising resident physicians in training and/or directing qualified nonphysician anesthesia providers in the provision of anesthesia care wherein the physician may delegate monitoring and appropriate tasks while retaining overall responsibility for the patient.

SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION – Terms used to describe the physician work required to oversee, manage and guide both residents and nonphysician anesthesia providers in the Anesthesia Care Team. For the purposes of this statement, supervision and direction are interchangeable and have no relation to the billing, payment or regulatory definitions that provide distinctions between these two terms (see **Addendum B**).

Safe Conduct of the Anesthesia Care Team

In order to achieve optimum patient safety, the anesthesiologist who directs the Anesthesia Care Team is responsible for the following:

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STATEMENT ON THE ANESTHESIA CARE TEAM (*cont'd*)

1. **Management of personnel** – Anesthesiologists should assure the assignment of appropriately skilled physician and/or nonphysician personnel for each patient and procedure.
2. **Preanesthetic evaluation of the patient** – A preanesthetic evaluation allows for the development of an anesthetic plan that considers all conditions and diseases of the patient that may influence the safe outcome of the anesthetic. Although nonphysicians may contribute to the preoperative collection and documentation of patient data, the anesthesiologist is responsible for the overall evaluation of each patient.
3. **Prescribing the anesthetic plan** – The anesthesiologist is responsible for prescribing an anesthesia plan aimed at the greatest safety and highest quality for each patient. The anesthesiologist discusses with the patient (when appropriate), the anesthetic risks, benefits and alternatives, and obtains informed consent. When a portion of the anesthetic care will be performed by another qualified anesthesia provider, the anesthesiologist should inform the patient that delegation of anesthetic duties is included in care provided by the Anesthesia Care Team.
4. **Management of the anesthetic** – The management of an anesthetic is dependent on many factors including the unique medical conditions of individual patients and the procedures being performed. Anesthesiologists should determine which perioperative tasks, if any, may be delegated. The anesthesiologist may delegate specific tasks to qualified nonanesthesiologist members of the ACT providing that quality of care and patient safety are not compromised, but should participate in critical parts of the anesthetic and remain immediately physically available for management of emergencies regardless of the type of anesthetic (see **Addendum B**).
5. **Postanesthesia care** – Routine postanesthesia care is delegated to postanesthesia nurses. The evaluation and treatment of postanesthetic complications are the responsibility of the anesthesiologist.

6. **Anesthesia consultation** – Like other forms of medical consultation, this is the practice of medicine and should not be delegated to nonphysicians.

Supervision of Nurse Anesthetists by Surgeons

Note: In this paragraph “surgeon(s)” may refer to any appropriately trained, licensed and credentialed nonanesthesiologist who may supervise nurse anesthetists.

General, regional and monitored anesthesia care all expose patients to risks. Nonanesthesiologist physicians may not possess the expertise that uniquely qualifies and enables anesthesiologists to manage the most clinically challenging medical situations that arise during the perioperative period. While a few surgical training programs provide some anesthesiology specific education (e.g., some oral and maxillofacial residencies), no surgical, dental, podiatric or any other nonanesthesiology training programs provide enough training specific to anesthesiology to enable their graduates to provide the level of medical supervision and clinical expertise that anesthesiologists provide. However, surgeons can still significantly add to patient safety and quality of care by assuming medical responsibility for all perioperative care when an anesthesiologist is not present. Anesthetic and surgical complications often arise unexpectedly and require immediate medical diagnosis and treatment. Even if state law or regulation says a surgeon is not “required” to supervise nonphysician anesthesia providers, the surgeon may be the only medical doctor on site. Whether the need is preoperative medical clearance or intraoperative resuscitation from an unexpected complication, the surgeon, both ethically and according to training and ability, should be expected to provide medical oversight or supervision of all perioperative health care provided, including nonphysician nurse anesthesia care. To optimize patient safety, careful consideration is required when surgeons can be expected to be the only medical doctor available to provide oversight of all perioperative care. This is especially true in freestanding surgery centers and surgeons’ offices where, in the event of unexpected emergencies, consultation with other medical specialists frequently is not available. In the event of unexpected emergencies, lack of immediately available and appropriately trained physician support can reduce the likelihood of successful resuscitation. This

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STATEMENT ON THE ANESTHESIA CARE TEAM (*cont'd*)

should always be a consideration when deciding which procedures should be performed in these settings, and on which patients, particularly if the individual supervising the nurse anesthetist is not a medical doctor with training appropriate for providing critical perioperative medical management.

ADDENDUM A:

Other personnel involved in perianesthetic care:

POSTANESTHESIA NURSE – a **registered nurse** who cares for patients recovering from anesthesia.

PERIOPERATIVE NURSE – a **registered nurse** who cares for the patient in the operating room.

CRITICAL CARE NURSE – a **registered nurse** who cares for patients in a special care area such the intensive care unit.

OBSTETRIC NURSE – a **registered nurse** who provides care to laboring patients.

NEONATAL NURSE – a **registered nurse** who provides cares to neonates in special care units.

RESPIRATORY THERAPIST – an **allied health professional** who provides respiratory care to patients.

Support personnel whose efforts deal with technical expertise, supply and maintenance:

ANESTHESIA TECHNOLOGISTS AND TECHNICIANS

ANESTHESIA AIDES

BLOOD GAS TECHNICIANS

RESPIRATORY TECHNICIANS

MONITORING TECHNICIANS

ADDENDUM B:

Commonly Used Billing Rules and Definitions

ASA recognizes the existence of commercial and governmental payer rules applying to billing for anesthesia services and encourages its members to comply with them whenever possible. Some commonly prescribed duties include:

- Performing a preanesthetic history and physical examination of the patient;
- Prescribing the anesthetic plan;
- Personal participation in the most demanding portions of the anesthetic, including induction and emergence, where applicable;
- Delegation of anesthesia care only to qualified anesthesia providers;

- Monitoring the course of anesthesia at frequent intervals;
- Remaining physically available for immediate diagnosis and treatment while medically responsible;
- Providing indicated postanesthesia care, and;
- Performing and documenting a post-anesthesia evaluation.

ASA also recognizes the lack of total predictability in anesthesia care and the variability in patient needs that can, in particular and infrequent circumstances, make it less appropriate from the viewpoint of overall patient safety and quality to comply with all payment rules in each patient at every moment in time. Reporting of services for payment must accurately reflect the services provided. The ability to prioritize duties and patient care needs, moment to moment, is a crucial skill of the anesthesiologist functioning safely within the anesthesia care team. Anesthesiologists must strive to provide the highest quality of care and greatest degree of patient safety to ALL patients in the perioperative environment at ALL times.

MEDICAL “DIRECTION” by anesthesiologist – A billing term describing the specific anesthesiologist work required in and restrictions involved in billing payers for the management and oversight of nonphysician anesthesia providers. This pertains to situations where anesthesiologists are involved in not more than four concurrent anesthetics. See individual payer manuals for specifics.

MEDICAL “SUPERVISION” by anesthesiologists – Medicare payment policy contains a special payment formula for “medical supervision” which applies “when the anesthesiologist is involved in furnishing more than four procedures concurrently or is performing other services while directing the concurrent procedures.” [Note: The word “supervision” may also be used outside of the Anesthesia Care Team to describe the perioperative medical oversight of nonphysician anesthesia providers by the operating practitioner/surgeon. Surgeon provided supervision pertains to general medical perioperative patient management and the components of anesthesia care that are medical and not nursing functions (e.g., determining medical readiness of patients for anesthesia and surgery, and providing critical medical management of unexpected emergencies).]

