August 18, 2022

DHHS Licensure Unit
Office of Research, Policy, and Quality Improvement ATTN: Credentialing Review
PO Box 94986
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Technical Review Committee Members:

Founded in 1975, the American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA) is the national organization dedicated to the ethical advancement of the Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant (CAA) profession and to excellence in patient care through education, advocacy, and promotion of the Anesthesia Care Team. With more than 2100 members, AAAA leads initiatives to license CAAs throughout the U.S.

AAAA strongly supports the Nebraska Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants and Nebraska Society of Anesthesiologists credentialing application that would begin the process of allowing CAAs to be licensed and practice in Nebraska. CAAs are currently allowed to practice in nineteen states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territory of Guam through licensure or delegatory authority. CAAs are recognized by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), TRICARE, and all major commercial insurance payors. CMS recognizes CAAs as a “qualified nonphysician anesthetist”, just like our Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) counterparts.

In the early 1960s, leaders in the medical specialty of Anesthesiology recognized the existence of staffing shortages. To meet growing demands and to accommodate the increasing complexity of anesthesia and surgery, three Anesthesiologists proposed the concept of an "anesthesia technologist" who would be a member of the anesthesia team and would be considered an "applied physiologist". This was the precursor to what is now the Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant. The doctors designed an educational program whereby students would build on undergraduate premedical training then earn a master’s degree in Anesthesiology. The concept became reality in 1969 when the first CAA training program began accepting students at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, followed shortly thereafter by a program at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

The idea of an anesthesia care team (ACT) is one of the crucial building blocks to the foundation of the CAA profession. CAAs work alongside and under the medical direction of physician Anesthesiologists, which creates a productive and safe environment for the patient. Working within the Anesthesia Care Team environment, meaning patients will always have two brains, two sets of hands and two sets of eyes involved in their care.

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All CAAs must complete a comprehensive didactic and clinical program at the graduate school level. To be admitted into a CAA training program, students must have earned a baccalaureate degree with premedical coursework. CAAs are trained extensively in the delivery and maintenance of quality anesthesia care as well as advanced patient monitoring techniques. CAAs perform such tasks as administering drugs, obtaining vascular access, applying and interpreting monitors, establishing and maintaining patient airway, and assisting with preoperative assessment. CAAs train and work under the supervision of physician Anesthesiologists who retain responsibility for the immediate care of the patient. The care team model expands the medical treatment provided by the physician Anesthesiologist and equips the medical facility to serve patients more effectively and efficiently.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), the Accreditation Review Committee for the Anesthesiologist Assistant (ARC-AA), the American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA), and the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) cooperate to establish, maintain, and promote appropriate standards of quality for educational programs for Anesthesiologist Assistants and to provide recognition of educational programs. The National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants administers the national certification exam that AAs must pass in order to become certified (and recertified).

Since 2002, there has been a significant expansion of AA education programs and there are currently 13 accredited programs in the US and several more expected in the coming months. Each year, approximately 325-350 newly graduated and certified anesthesiologist assistants entered the workforce.

The scope of CAA clinical practice is generally the same as that of nurse anesthetists on the Anesthesia Care Team, and CAAs and CRNAs work interchangeably in the operating room. The local scope of practice of CAAs is usually defined by the following:

- The medically directing Anesthesiologist
- The hospital credentialing body
- The state's board of medicine
- Any applicable state statute or regulation.

CAAs provide safe and effective care as part of the anesthesia care team and can help increase access to care in states that are facing health care workforce shortages. A 2018 study published in the journal *Anesthesiology* found that the specific composition of the anesthesia care team consisting of nonphysicians providers (nurse anesthetists and certified anesthesiologist assistants) was not associated with any significant

differences in mortality, length of stay, or inpatient spending. The study also stated that "in the face of predicted physician shortages the expanded use of nonphysician providers could increase access, particularly in underserved areas where physician recruitment is challenging."

AAAA appreciates the work of the Technical Review Committee and DHHS staff and we are happy to provide you with any additional information or resources that would help support the credentialing application.

Thank you and please contact me if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

Laura Knoblauch
President
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