BOX BUTTE
GENERAL HOSPITAL
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Great Things Are Happening Here!

August 26, 2022

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Licensure Unit
Attn: Technical Review Committee
PO Box 95026
Lincoln, NE 68509-5026

Attn: Technical Review Committee, Board of Health, and Dr. Anthone

Over the past several weeks, I have learned more about the Anesthesiologist Assistant proposal for the state of Nebraska. I am writing to urge you to recommend against the licensing proposal. It is vitally important to Nebraska rural hospitals to maintain health care services in our local communities. These facilities serve to stabilize trauma patients for transfer, deliver babies, perform routine procedures and surgeries, and provide lifesaving care during a pandemic. Rural hospitals are not only a lifeline for patients, but for the entire communities we serve.

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) provide the majority of anesthetic care in Nebraska and 100% of the anesthetics delivered at critical access hospitals like Box Butte General. CRNAs are educated and trained to manage complex patients and situations independently. CRNAs earn a bachelor of science in nursing degree and work on average, 3-7 years with critically ill patients in intensive care units before returning to an accredited nurse anesthesia program for an additional three years of rigorous didactic and clinical education. Currently, approximately 64,000 CRNAs practice in the United States in both rural and urban settings.

Anesthesiologists Assistants (AAs) were first introduced in Ohio and Georgia over 40 years ago. To date there are approximately 3,000 in the United States. They reside primarily in Ohio, Georgia, and Florida. An AA requires the direct on-site physical presence of a physician anesthesiologist at all times. Therefore, in hospitals like Box Butte General, where we depend on independent CRNAs; licensure of AAs will not alleviate access to care issues. Instead, they only stand to decrease the number of CRNAs a hospital is able to recruit to underserved rural areas due to the negative impact AA licensure will cause to CRNA schools and clinical sites.

Nebraska should prioritize educating, recruiting, and retaining independently licensed CRNAs and physicians to ensure continued quality and access to care. AAs are not the answer to the healthcare shortage in the immediate future. In fact, introducing AAs in Nebraska will only further exacerbate the shortage of our independent providers. Rural hospitals depend on CRNAs to keep their doors open by providing quality, cost-effective care.

While taking a look at scope of practice for other professional nurses and aide positions, such as Nurse Tech, or Nurse Aide, Medical Assistant, LPN and RN, seems like the logical next step, the change in anesthesia model does not align with this theory.

Licensure of AAs would be bad for Nebraska because:

- They cannot practice independently.
- They increase cost.
- They do not improve patient access to anesthesia services.

I urge you to recommend AGAINST licensure of Anesthesiologist Assistants.

Respectfully,

Lori Mazanec

Lori Mazanec, MHA, ACHE
Chief Executive Officer