

NURSE ANESTHETIST EDUCATION PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive updates the policy relating to the continuing program to educate Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) critical care nurses to be Nurse Anesthetists.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** Major changes include:
 - a. Updated references to current Army facility name.
 - b. Updated responsible office and current titles.
 - c. Clarification that Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) are to contact the National Anesthesia Service if they are unable to place a newly graduated Nurse Anesthetist.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** VHA Handbook 1020.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Specialty Care Services (10P11) is responsible for the content of this directive. Questions may be addressed to the Office of Specialty Care Services, National Director of Anesthesia at 202-461-7120.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Directive 2009-025, dated May 7, 2009 is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of May 2022. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.

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NURSE ANESTHETIST EDUCATION PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive establishes policy relating to the continuing program to educate Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) critical care nurses to be Nurse Anesthetists. **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7301(b), 7401, and 7671-7675.

2. BACKGROUND

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) are an important part of the surgical-anesthesia team providing health care to Veterans. VA employs the greatest number of CRNAs in the Federal sector on a full-time basis. A continuing supply of well-trained CRNAs is critical to VHA's ability to complete its mission. To help address this need, VHA has developed a partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD) to educate future VA Nurse Anesthetists at the U.S. Army Graduate Program in Anesthesia Nursing (USAGPAN) at the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School (AMEDDC&S), located at Joint Base San Antonio - Fort Sam Houston, through a set-aside of positions for existing VA critical care nurses. Pending available funds, VA will fund the tuition and other authorized education expenses through the use of the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) (see VHA Handbook 1020, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) Procedures). Phase 1 of the education is at Joint Base San Antonio and lasts 12 months. Phase 2 of the education is primarily clinical and is completed at a VA medical facility.

a. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with DoD provides that VA and DoD will negotiate the number of VA student positions annually, subject to the availability of Phase 2 clinical resources. A copy of the MOA may be obtained by request to the National Anesthesia Service at vhanas@va.gov.

b. Beyond the EISP funding, all other expenses associated with the VA employee participating in this educational advancement opportunity are the personal expenses of the participant. To participate in the EISP, participants must comply with program requirements specified in VHA Handbook 1020, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) Procedures.

NOTE: *The potential for continuation of salary during the educational program is a local issue and not part of this program or directive.*

c. Local VA medical facilities need to consider filling the Registered Nurse's (RN) position of the individual training to be a Nurse Anesthetist, as that individual will be returning to fill a new position as a Nurse Anesthetist, not as a critical care nurse.

d. To participate in this program, the applicant has to meet the admission criteria of both the Army Graduate School and Northeastern University (NEU), the actual degree granting institution. In addition to meeting those criteria, each applicant is screened by a VA Admissions Committee responsible for making the final decision regarding who

participates in this educational opportunity. Any in person interviews required by either the Army Graduate School or NEU will be done at the expense of the applicant, not VA.

e. Failure to meet DoD and NEU academic standards can result in dismissal from this program. Dismissal from this program for academic or disciplinary failure will result in monetary penalties as specified by 38 U.S.C. 7675.

NOTE: *Participants in this program are required to wear appropriate business attire when on the Army campus.*

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy to accept into the Nurse Anesthetist Education Program only those VA employees qualified and willing to accept EISP funding, sign an EISP agreement, and make a service commitment to VA as a Nurse Anesthetist.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Director, National Anesthesia Service.** The Director, National Anesthesia Service, as delegated by the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services, is responsible for:

- (1) Appointing members of the VA Admissions Committee;
- (2) Developing committee selection criteria;
- (3) Serving as committee chair; and
- (4) Forwarding committee selections to DoD.

b. **VA Admissions Committee.** The VA Admissions Committee is composed of the Director and Deputy Director of the National Anesthesia Service, the VA CRNA Education Program Representatives, and other members as appointed.

(1) The committee develops the criteria for evaluation that includes consideration of the likelihood of the applicant to remain a long-term VA employee; recent proficiencies; physical fitness; and letters of recommendation from the immediate supervisor, which at a minimum, must address the applicant's work ethic.

(2) The committee can require interviews. Interview modalities can be in person, video teleconference, or teleconference. Priority will be given to interview modes that do not cause travel expenses for the applicant.

c. **Deputy Director, National Anesthesia Service.** The Deputy Director, National Anesthesia Service, is responsible for making sure this program opportunity gets wide distribution and announcement in the VA nursing community. The Deputy Director is also the designated VA representative as referenced in the MOA.

d. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director is responsible for recommending participants in this program and timely appointment or assignment of the

participant in the occupation for which the EISP scholarship prepared the participant. If unable to place the EISP participant, the facility Director must request support from the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) to identify a suitable position at another VA medical facility that is mutually acceptable to the participant and VA. National Anesthesia Service will be consulted if the VISN is unable to find a suitable position.

5. REFERENCES

a. VHA Handbook 1020, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) Procedures.

b. Memorandum of Agreement between the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School and the Department of Veterans Affairs, Subject: U.S. Army Graduate Program in Anesthesia Nursing, Joint Base San Antonio - Fort Sam Houston TX.