

May 7, 2009

## 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.

**2. BACKGROUND:** Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) are an important part of the surgical-anesthesia team providing care to Veterans. VA employs the greatest number of CRNAs on a full-time basis in the Federal sector. VA is experiencing a period of unmet nursing needs that mirrors the looming crisis in the private sector. The result is a difficulty in finding CRNAs available to fill VHA vacancies, thus reducing 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 Nurse Anesthetists at the U.S. Army Graduate Program in Anesthesia Nursing at the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School (AMEDDC&S) located at Fort Sam Houston, TX, 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.*)

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.

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 policy on the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program.

**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 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. Should the Army Graduate School, or NEU, require in person interviews, those will be done at the expense of the applicant, not VA. Beyond meeting those criteria, the applicants are screened by a VA Admissions Committee responsible for making the final decision regarding who participates in this educational opportunity.

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 due under EISP regulations.

**THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES MAY 31, 2014**

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*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. ACTION

a. **Director, National Anesthesia Service.** The Director, National Anesthesia Service, as delegated by the Chief Patient Care Services Officer, is responsible for:

- (1) Appointing members of the VA Admissions Committee;
- (2) Developing committee selection criteria; and
- (3) Forwarding committee selections to DOD.

b. **The 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 Directors, 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. For a VA-required interview an interview mode will be considered that does not cause travel expense 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. **Facility Director.** The 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 VISN to identify a suitable position at another VA facility that is mutually acceptable to the participant and VA.

**5. REFERENCES**

a. Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, VHA Handbook 1020.

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

**6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** The Office of Patient Care Services (11) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be referred to the National Director for Anesthesiology (111) at 206-764-2157.

**7. RECISSIONS:** VHA Directive 2004-003 is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires May 31, 2014.

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