

February 6, 2004

NURSE ANESTHETIST EDUCATION PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy relating to a new 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 VHA 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 need 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 Dir.1020, and VHA HK 1020.1).

a. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with DOD provides for between two and ten set-aside positions for VA nurses. Year 1 will be for three positions. In subsequent years, within the range provided by the MOA, VA and DOD will negotiate the number of positions annually.

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.

***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 should consider filling the Registered Nurse (R.N.) position of the individual training to be a Nurse Anesthetist as the 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 the University of Texas at Houston (UT-H), the actual degree granting institution. Should the Army Graduate School, or UT-H, require in person interviews those will be done at the expense of the applicant, not VA. Beyond meeting those criteria, the applicants will be screened by a VA admissions committee responsible for making the final decision regarding who participates in this educational opportunity.

e. The VA Admissions Committee will be de facto composed of the Director and Deputy Director of the National Anesthesia Service, the VA CRNA Education Program Director, and other members as appointed by the Chief, Patient Care Services, or designee.

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(1) The VA 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 VA 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.

f. Failure to meet DOD and/or UT-H academic standards can result in dismissal from this program. Dismissal from this program for academic or disciplinary failure may result in monetary penalties due under EISP regulations.

NOTE: Participants in this program are 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 contract, and make a service commitment to VA as a Nurse Anesthetist.

4. ACTION

a. **Facility Director.** The facility Director is responsible for recommending participants in this program and promoting them for EISP funding to the Network Director.

b. **Network Director.** The Network Director is responsible for considering sponsoring participants at the Network level for EISP funding and acting on recommendations from facility Directors.

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.

d. **Director-National Anesthesia Service.** The Director, National Anesthesia Service, is responsible for forming the final selection committee, developing committee selection criteria, and forwarding committee selections to DOD.

5. REFERENCES

a. Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, VHA Directive 1020, and VHA Handbook 1020.1

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.

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6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: National Director for Anesthesiology (111), is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be referred to 206-764-2052.

7. RECISSIONS: None. This VHA Directive expires February 28, 2009.

S/ Robert H. Roswell, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

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