

The Honorable Robert Wilkie, Secretary
The Honorable Richard Stone, M.D., Executive in Charge
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

April 8, 2020

Dear Secretary Wilkie and Dr. Stone,

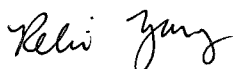
"The Association of VA Anesthesiologists (AVAA) and the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) write you today to reaffirm our commitment to the Department of the Veterans Affairs and our patients for whom we proudly provide the highest quality anesthesia care. As we work to fulfil that commitment, we urge the VA to acknowledge the dramatic reduction in surgical volume at VA facilities and the imperative to expand access to critical care services. Accordingly, we urge VA to preserve the physician-led team-based model of anesthesia care and that VA work to facilitate staff to transition to provide much needed critical care services.

With the tidal wave about to land on us, we all feel a sense a fear for our loved ones and ourselves. While none of us have ever seen anything like this, I want to assure you that physician anesthesiologists are among the most well-prepared individuals to handle this crisis. Only a small group of doctors on the planet are as uniquely trained and qualified, as we are to respond to this unique respiratory tract virus and care for these critically ill patients. Whether in the operating room or the intensive care unit, we have over 12 years of training, four of which are dedicated to critical care, airway, and ventilator management. We are ready to give our best and are proud of the role we play in serving our country in this hour of need. Accountable to our patients and to you, our leadership, we stand ready to work with you to ensure that safe, high-quality, physician-led care is uninterrupted for our Veterans and any other patients with whose care we may be charged.

VA physician anesthesiologists are ready to be at the forefront of this battle against COVID-19. Throughout the country, the vast majority of anesthesia care is delivered personally by a physician anesthesiologist or in a physician-led, team-based model of anesthesia care. This model, supported by the VHA's National Anesthesia Service, a collaboration between VA physician anesthesiologists and VA certified nurse anesthetists is sound, well-tested, and ensures Veterans have access to safe, quality, anesthesia care. We have confidence that the National Anesthesia Service (NAS) is acting in the best interest of both physician anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists and thus we believe that in order to assure continued strong leadership and coordination at the national level, the NAS should be the sole office directing and coordinating all aspects of anesthesia practice as regulated in VHA Directive 1123. We understand that each local facility has unique considerations and ultimately, the decision to assume new responsibilities is based on an array of considerations relevant to the local facility and state needs.

Whether in the intensive care unit (ICU), operating room, emergency department, or non-operating procedural rooms, the physician-led anesthesia care team is cooperative, highly coordinated, and uniquely qualified to deliver a continuum of safe, high quality care. Now with the postponement of elective procedures, surgical cases, and non-operating room cases, physician anesthesiologists are available to assist with airway and ventilation management of COVID-19 patients throughout the hospital, as well as to continue to provide anesthetic care to emergent cases in surgical or procedural settings.

These are scary and uncertain times. The anesthesia care team is united and ready to get us through this crisis. VA physician anesthesiologists stand ready to work together with our anesthesia care team for the continued health of our Veterans and our nation. Ultimately, the metric of our success will depend on our teamwork and ability to work cooperatively. Please allow us to help you lead the way in this crisis for the protection and safety of our Veteran patients. Sincerely,



Relin Yang, MD
President, Association of VA Anesthesiologists
(AVAA)



Mary Dale Peterson MD, MHA, FACHE, FASA
President, American Society of Anesthesiologists
(ASA)



Brooke Trainer, MD
President-Elect, Association of VA Anesthesiologist
(AVAA)