



# Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists Policy Statement on Anesthesia Assistant Role 2014

## **Introduction**

Anesthesia Assistant (AA) is a job title assigned to specially trained healthcare professionals who participate in the care of the patient during general, regional, or procedural sedation anesthesia through medical directives<sup>1</sup> under the supervision of the anesthesiologist.

The Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists (NSCRT) is of the position that the role of Anesthesia Assistants (AA), as defined in the 2006 Canadian Anesthesiologists Society (CAS) Position Paper on Anesthesia Assistants<sup>2</sup>, falls within the scope of practice of Respiratory Therapy<sup>3</sup>. Respiratory Therapists education provides entry level competencies related to assisting with anesthesia. However, the role of Anesthesia Assistant requires additional education and clinical training to further develop specific competencies required to fulfill the role.

The NSCRT supports the role of anesthesia assistants within the anesthesia care team as being in the public's best interest as it is a means to enhance safe and efficient anesthetic care. We encourage compliance with the CAS 2013 Guidelines to the Practice of Anesthesia.<sup>6</sup> The health care facility must ensure that ancillary personnel are available as assistants to the anesthesiologist. Such assistants must be available at all times and places where anesthesia services are provided. It is preferred that a facility will have a formally designated "Anesthesia Assistant" (AA)."

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy statement is to guide respiratory therapists' employers and health agencies so as to ensure that individuals hired to fulfill the role of anesthesia assistants meet the criteria defined herein.

## **History**

For several decades, RRT's have worked alongside anesthesiologists in operating rooms. The traditional role of the operating room RRT has primarily included technical support to the anesthesiologist and assistance with airway management. As RRTs continued to support anesthesia care their role evolved and expanded into, what is now called, the Anesthesia Assistant.

Anesthesiologists have identified additional support needs for safe delivery of anesthesia care and improved efficiencies. In 2006 the CAS developed a position paper<sup>2</sup> specifically addressing the role of AAs in which they state:

"The Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society (CAS) is searching for ways to improve the efficiency of anesthesiologists while maintaining or enhancing the quality of care. Given this background, the concept of Anesthesia Assistants (AAs) is endorsed by the CAS."

While RRTs make up a large percentage of AAs practicing in Canada, there are, in some jurisdictions, Registered Nurses (RNs) with experience in critical care who have additional education and possess the required competencies to practice as AAs.

### **Policy Statement**

The NSCRT considers the practice of anesthesia assistants, as defined in the Canadian Anesthesiologists Society Position Paper on Anesthesia Assistants 2006<sup>2</sup>, to be within the legislated scope of practice of respiratory therapists who have gained additional knowledge, skills, and judgement required to competently and safely practice in this role.

It is recommended that employers and health agencies that include Anesthesia Assistants as ancillary personnel within their anesthesia care team ensure that individuals hired into the AA role possess the competencies outlined in this document. The health agency should define the AA role that is appropriate to context of practice and client need within the institution. The scope and boundaries of this role should be clearly defined in health agency policy and role descriptions.

RRTs who wish to practice as Anesthesia Assistants must ensure they have the required education and competencies as outlined in this document.

### **Qualifications**

The Anesthesia Assistant role requires licensed health professionals who possess core competencies that relate to supporting anesthesia care and have the following:

- Successful completion of anesthesia assistant program from an accredited educational institution
- Successful completion of an anesthesia assistant clinical practicum
- A professional portfolio<sup>4</sup> that includes reflection on practice, and objectives and methods for maintenance of competency

Respiratory Therapists practicing as AAs have the same professional responsibilities as RRTs in other areas of practice. They shall adhere to the principles of ethical and professional conduct, they are accountable to provide safe and competent care while respecting the confidentiality and dignity of all individuals.

### **Required Competencies**

The Anesthesia Assistant role requires an AA to be competent to perform duties such as but not limited to:

- Apply medical directives for anesthesia assistants
- Conduct peri-operative patient assessment ,
- Assist with general anesthesia; induction, maintenance and emergence and regional anesthesia such as:
  - Set up, verify and apply anesthesia and perioperative equipment
  - Manage anesthesia medication
  - Perform airway management
  - Assist with and perform vascular access

- Apply critical thinking skills when assisting in all phases of general anesthesia
- Assist with post anesthesia care or non-operative care such as:
  - Conduct patient assessment
  - Monitor hemodynamics
  - Perform airway management
- Assist with pain management
- Perform procedural sedation

## **Training and Education**

A number of accredited educational institutions across Canada have AA programs of study. The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapist (CSRT) in collaboration with the CAS, Association of Canadian University Departments of Anesthesia (ACUDA) and National Association of Peri Anesthesia Nurses of Canada (NAPANC), completed the development of the National Education Framework for Anesthesia Assistants<sup>5</sup> in 2010 to standardize AA educational program content. There are currently five schools in Canada providing anesthesia assistant programs that are comprised of didactic and clinical courses. They are:

Thompson River University in Kamloops, British Columbia.	<a href="http://www.tru.ca">www.tru.ca</a>
University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba	<a href="http://www.umanitoba.ca">www.umanitoba.ca</a>
The Michener Institute in Toronto, Ontario	<a href="http://www.mitchener.ca">www.mitchener.ca</a>
Algonquin College in Ottawa, Ontario	<a href="http://www.algonquincollege.com">www.algonquincollege.com</a>
Fanshaw College in London, Ontario	<a href="http://www.fanchawec.ca">www.fanchawec.ca</a>

## **Summary**

The Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists supports the integration of qualified AAs into the anesthesia care team as a positive contribution to efficient and quality anesthesia care in Nova Scotia.

The Policy Statement on Anesthesia Assistants will be reviewed annually by the Professional Practice Committee to monitor national trends, current practice, relevant publications, and to update the policy accordingly.

## **References**

- 1 Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists, NSCRT Care Directives, 2011
- 2 Canadian Anesthesiologists Society, CAS Position Paper on Anesthesia Assistants 2006
- 3 Bill 141 2007, Respiratory Therapists Act
- 4 Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists, Respiratory Therapists Continuing Competency Program, 2010
- 5 Canadian Anesthesiologists Society, Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, National Education Framework for Anesthesia Assistants, 2010
- 6 Canadian Anesthesiologists Society, Guidelines to the Practice of Anesthesia, Revised Edition 2013
- 7 The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, CSRT Position Paper on Anesthesia Assistants, 2008
- 8 A Plan to Evolve the Anesthesia Care Team Model in Ontario Report 2009
- 9 Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists By-Laws
- 10 College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia, Policy Statement – Registered Nurse First Assistant Role (RNFA) 2012
- 11 College of Respiratory Therapist of Ontario, CRTO Position Statement. Respiratory Therapist as Anesthesia Assistants 2005
- 12 Canadian Anesthesiologists Society, CAS Position Paper on Procedural Sedation 2013