

NAVAPD Letter: SECVA
May 15, 2023

The Honorable Denis McDonough
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

The National Association of Veterans Affairs Physicians and Dentists (NAVAPD) has learned The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reviewing and possibly amending the current physician-led anesthesia care team model used at VA medical facilities. We, as a professional association for physicians and dentists, are compelled to advise when we believe a proposal is contrary to the interests of patients at VA and could compromise patients health and safety. NAVAPD strongly opposes VA amending the physician-led anesthesia care team model to allow non-physicians to practice well beyond their education and training.

There are no anesthesia access issues and no shortage of physician anesthesiologists in VA to warrant even the consideration of removing physicians from overseeing the anesthesia care of patients, who often have complex and multiple health issues. Furthermore, Veterans who have been exposed to burn pits, or suffered from pulmonary diseases exacerbated by COVID-19, introduce additional complexity for anesthesia management. Removing an anesthesiologist from surgery puts the patient's health and life unnecessarily at risk.

Physician-led anesthesia care is predominantly used in the U.S and is the policy of every major hospital in the country. It's important to note that only four states (Alaska, Montana, New Hampshire, and Oregon), which represent less than four percent of the U.S. population, allow independent anesthesia practice. 46 states covering 96 percent of the U.S. population require team-based care.

There is no reason our nation's Veterans should receive a lower standard of anesthesia care, especially when they have significant medical conditions and are more likely to be at risk for surgical complications.

We strongly urge you to uphold the current patient safety-centered, proven physician-led anesthesia care team model at VA. Removing Veteran access to anesthesiology physicians is bad policy and compromises the safety of patients. We remain committed to working closely with VA and ensuring Veterans receive the quality care they have earned.

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Abate, DMD
President, NAVAPD