

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Nursing Handbook FAQ

What is the VHA Nursing Handbook?

The Nursing Handbook is a proposed document the VHA has been working on for the past several years to centralize, modernize, and improve the regulations guiding the practice of nursing, including advanced practice nursing, throughout the VHA.

Does the Nursing Handbook include provisions specifically relating to CRNA Practice?

Yes. The proposal would recognize the Full Practice Authority of all advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), including CRNAs, working in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system. This policy change would enable all CRNAs to practice to the full scope of their academic preparation and training, and help to standardize the scope of practice for CRNAs across the VA healthcare system.

What is current VA policy for CRNA practice?

The practice of CRNAs and the delivery of anesthesia are subject to the existing VA Anesthesia Handbook 1123, at http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1548.

Does the VA Anesthesia Handbook require physician supervision of CRNAs?

No. While the Anesthesia Handbook emphasizes a team-based approach to anesthesia delivery, it does not require physician supervision or anesthesiologist supervision of CRNAs. There are currently several facilities operating today with CRNAs as the sole providers of anesthesia.

Does the Nursing Handbook supersede the current Anesthesia Handbook or change current anesthesia practice in the VHA?

No. CRNAs will be recognized as Full Practice Providers (FPP) and continue to work under the guidelines of the existing Anesthesia Handbook.

If adopted, will the Nursing Handbook affect team based delivery of anesthesia or force CRNAs to work independently?

No. The Nursing handbook will not end the team based approach to anesthesia delivery. The proposed policy supports the team based model of care that will fully utilize the knowledge, skills, and abilities of CRNAs. As a member of the anesthesia team, CRNAs will be able to lead anesthesia teams, consult with their physician colleagues, and will receive the same professional practice review, evaluation, and monitoring as all other anesthesia providers.

Why did the VHA decide to adopt this policy?

Motivated by the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine report *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* that support the policy of APRNs practicing to their full scope, the VA seeks to

continue innovating in efficient and effective healthcare delivery. This action is the right policy at the right time to improve Veterans access to timely, high quality healthcare.

Can CRNAs practice without supervision in other federal settings?

Yes. The Army, Navy, Air Force, Indian Health Services, and Combat Support Hospitals all allow for CRNAs to practice without physician supervision.

Who is currently supporting this issue?

AANA, the Association of Veterans Affairs Nurse Anesthetists (AVANA), 53 Nursing organizations, the AARP, and 28 members of the House of Representatives have all communicated support for full practice authority for APRNs.