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Continuing Education Preferences Amongst CRNAs

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Executive Summary

Introduction of the Problem

Anesthesia is an evolving field and continued education (CE) is an essential component of nurse anesthesia practice. To ensure compliance with high standards of care in the profession, certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) are required to obtain continuing education units (CEUs) for each certification period. Ongoing credentialing through continued education demonstrates that a CRNA has remained up-to-date with evidence-based practices (NBCRNA, 2019). There are multiple means of earning continuing education hours, and these include online and in-person training. Educational conferences are offered by professional state organizations to keep memberships up-to-date on the latest in the industry while also offering CE credits through the America Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) (IANA, 2019). While the Illinois Association of Nurse Anesthetists (IANA) is one of the organizations providing AANA approved CEUs, the IANA has noticed a recent loss in attendance at the state meetings. This decreased attendance has led to a loss in revenue and concern for how the state members are complying with educational requirements. The loss in revenue places a financial strain on the association that benefits CRNA practice. The IANA advocates for the nurse anesthesia profession in the state of Illinois by providing leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of the profession, as well as strong legislative and regulatory advocacy (IANA, 2019).

Leaders of the IANA sought assistance to implement a survey of CRNAs to assess how their organization can better provide educational needs to the members. The results of the assessment will guide an educational plan to meet the needs of the CRNA state members, and in the long-term, will increase revenue to promote the advocacy work of IANA.

Literature Review

A review of literature was conducted to investigate the current CEU requirements for CRNAs. In addition, the review described the evidence regarding the educational preferences of CRNAs and the barriers that exist to obtaining CEUs.

When examining Class A and Class B credits, 54.07% (n=73) of respondents indicated that Class A credits were more difficult to earn, while 45.93% of respondents indicated that Class B were more difficult to earn (n=62). The AANA (2019) states that Class A takes many forms including multiple choice questions, simulation demonstrations, case studies, or self-assessment, while Class B credits are self-reported, do not require approval, do not require an assessment, and includes presentations, teaching/precepting students, publication, and research (Schoneboom, 2016).

When examining the literature for CEU preferences; lectures, online & in-person conferences, workshops, and simulations were most preferred. In a study of 318 nurses, lectures were most favored followed by simulations (Pilcher, 2013). In a study of 517 licensed medical professionals, hands-on workshops (91%) and conference activities (89%) were the most preferred continuing professional education activities (Hardy, 2019). The evidence suggests that integrating newer methods of CE such as simulations, testing, workshops, and an online CE portfolio, will benefit CRNAs while reducing barriers to the credentialing requirements. In a study of 27 CRNAs, participants ranked recertification activities they associated with an increase in competency (Marienau, 2011). From most to least effective, responses were: (1) hands-on simulation testing, (2) continuing medical education (e.g., interactive workshops), and (3) written exams (Marienau, 2011). In a cross-sectional study of 161 participants, 59.6% of the respondents did not complete CE hours through attending live programs at local, state, or national association

meetings, while 45.3% indicated that they completed at least 50% of the required CE credit hours through online CE programs (Alkhateeb, Attarabee, & Alameddine, 2016). By providing educational opportunities of greater perceived benefit, lower cost, and increased accessibility, it is more likely that CRNAs will actively engage in the CEUs offered.

Appealing characteristics of CEUs found in the literature included interest in the topic area being delivered, development of new professional knowledge and skills, and increasing work competency (Grehan, Butler, Last, & Rainford, 2018). Lower costs, meeting locations, courses on newer technology, and the appeal of keynote speakers were also noted to make meetings more appealing (Britt, Gresens, Weireter, & Britt, 2014). The development of an online educational portfolio with webinars reduces barriers that CRNAs face when trying to earn CEUs. Online learning allows CRNAs to earn credits without the costs and time away from work and home due to travel. In an online survey of 1,387 respondents consisting of primarily RNs, accessibility (affordability, location, and time) was the biggest barrier preventing them from CE opportunities (Canadian Nurses Association, 2018). A study of 2,838 registered nurses identified the main barriers to obtaining CEUs as follows: distance (16%), financial concerns (29%), and time (30%) (Penz et. al, 2007). With limited coverage for independent providers in Illinois, traveling for CEUs is not an option for many CRNAs in the state. There are 31 counties in Illinois that have no anesthesia providers and 74% of those counties are surrounded by other counties predominantly covered by CRNAs for access to anesthesia care (IANA, 2020). In 29% of counties in IL, CRNAs are the only providers of anesthesia (IANA, 2020).

Project Methods

The purpose of this project was to provide information to the IANA leaders to improve CE opportunities at the state level. The objectives were to: review current evidence-based

literature to determine the CE requirements and preferences of CRNAs, develop a survey for the IANA, gain approval for the survey from the board of directors at the IANA, distribute the survey, and evaluate survey results.

The survey was self-authored, based on the literature review, and reviewed by stakeholders prior to distribution. The 15-question survey included several types of questions multiple choice, select all that apply, pick top three, yes/no, and fill in the blank. Questions were designed to gain information about CRNA perceptions related to continued professional development, current CEU formats utilized, preferences for future CE opportunities, and suggestions for reducing barriers to allow for CRNA engagement through the IANA. The survey was distributed using SurveyMonkey, to all the CRNAs and SRNAs in the IANA's address book (n=1,886). Survey data were collected and uploaded to an excel spreadsheet for data analysis. Results were presented to the IANA Executive Director as a guide for improvements to the current CE portfolio.

Evaluation

Evaluation of current CEUs was completed through the CRNA survey and data analysis. The majority of respondents (98.6%, n=141) were practicing anesthesia in the state of Illinois, while 1.4% (n=2) were not. Among the 143 respondents, 90.21% (n=129) were members of IANA, and 9.79% (n=14) were not. Demographic data on the years of experience as an anesthesia provider indicated the largest represented population of CRNAs had 15+ years of experience at 33.57% (n=48), followed by 0-2 years at 21.68% (n=31), 2-5 years of experience at 15.38% (n=22), and lastly, both 5-10 years and 10-15 years had 14.69% (n=21) each. The highest percentage, 35.66% (n=51) of CRNAs were between 30 and 40 years of age, followed by 27.97% (n=40) with ages between 41 and 50, 14.69% were between the ages of 50 and 60,

12.59% were between the ages of 60 and 89, and 9.09% were less than 30 years of age. Of the 143 respondents, 29.58% (n=42) were practicing in the Chicago Metro area, followed 26.06% (n=37) in Central Illinois, 18.31% (n=26) in Northern Illinois, 13.38% (n=19) in Southern Illinois, and 12.68% (n=18) of respondents were practicing in the Metro East (St. Louis) area.

An overall theme gleaned from the results was the preference for an online educational format and future online conferences. The vast majority (95.07%, n=135) of respondents indicated they would be interested in an online database offered by the IANA. Over half of the respondents, 63.38% (n=90), indicated the need for IANA to offer online modules and case studies as opposed to other CE opportunities offered at future events. Respondents indicated their next preference is in-person conferences within the state of Illinois (54.93%, n=78), followed by online conferences (47.89%, n=68), workshops (5.77%, n=65), in-person conferences outside the state of Illinois (15.49%, n=22), on-job training/precepting (14.79%, n=21), and lastly, paper exams and/or quizzes (9.86%, n=14). The majority of respondents (73.94%, n=105) have attended conferences and/or workshops offered by IANA.

CRNAs were asked to report the biggest barriers they encountered to earning CEUs. In descending frequency, the barriers included being able to take time away from work (40.14%, n=57), family restraints (19.72%, n=28), uninteresting topics offered (7.61%, n=25), cost of attendance (13.38%, n=19), and lastly, traveling to meetings (9.15%, n=13). When exploring the most distance and time a CRNA would travel for CEUs, 35.92% (n=51) of respondents were willing to fly, 28.87% (n=41) were willing to travel at most 1 to 2 hours, 16.9% (n=24) were willing to travel at most 2 to 4 hours, 14.08% (n=20) were only willing to travel less than an hour, and lastly, 4.23% of CRNAs (n= 6) were willing to travel a maximum of 4 hours. A large majority (71.63%, n=101) of respondents had employers that provided educational assistance to

fund CEUs. The highest amount offered by an employer was \$6,500 annually while 28.37% (n=40) did not receive financial assistance for CEUs.

Impact on Practice

IANA plans to use the information gathered to motivate the board of directors to launch an online continuing education database to better suit the educational needs of CRNAs. The results of the survey will guide an educational plan to further meet the needs of state members by providing the preferred CE opportunities from the results listed above. As a result, the IANA is working to provide CRNAs high quality, evidenced-based practices in future educational conferences (online and in-person) and workshops. By offering these preferred educational needs, members will meet CEU requirements and in return, IANA will have increased revenue to promote further advocacy work. Ongoing implementation should include providing a brief survey to evaluate the quality and ease of attending CE events in the future. These results will continue to guide the IANA in providing the preferred means of earning CEUs.

Conclusions

The survey served as an effective tool to collect data on CRNAs in Illinois and results indicated that CRNAs in Illinois most prefer online modules and case studies to earn their required CEUs for licensure. The survey fulfilled the needs of the Executive Director of the IANA, and will serve as a foundation to analyze, and make changes at future IANA events. Based on the findings in this survey, in-person conferences will continue to be offered with the addition of an online format to reduce barriers of earning CEUs. An online format will offer case studies, modules, and online meetings and conferences to further contribute to a greater continuing education portfolio for the IANA. It is imperative that the IANA implements new

educational opportunities that actively engage CRNAs resulting in an increase in clinical competence, member attendance, and revenue.

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