Professional Involvement

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I began my journey into Nurse Anesthesia well over a year ago and learned, like many of us, that it is replete with sacrifice, rapid growth, ego destruction, and boundless pride. There is a satisfaction in looking into the future and marrying that vision of things to come with my scholastic journey, therein bettering myself as a novice and ultimately bettering my profession.

As a novice member of CANA, I wanted to examine the path of professional involvement from a more seasoned member, and who better than our new CANA President, Chuck Griffis. The following is my interview with Chuck regarding his professional path.

SRJ: Hi Chuck, thanks for letting me interview you. Can you tell me about your first CRNA job?

CG: Well, I had graduated from the UCLA Program of Nurse Anesthesia in 1981 […] and I just became part of the faculty by staying at UCLA at that point […]. And so I taught SRNAs in the operating room, but then, of course, I also worked as a CRNA in the operating room providing anesthesia for patients too.

SRJ: Did you know when you were in CRNA school that you were going to be this involved in your profession? Did you think that you would start off by being faculty?

CG: No, I never really knew that I was going to want to be this professionally involved because I was really focused entirely on physiology, pharmacology, anesthesia technique, and patient care when I was in anesthesia school. And the reason that I became a faculty member was sort of by default because if you stayed at UCLA at that point on staff, then you were going to be teaching students. So, for me it wasn't like any life-long plan or anything, it

was something that I kind of got lucky and sort of fell into.

SRJ: What does professional involvement mean to you?

CG: It means that I look beyond squeezing the bag and sticking a needle in, in dealing with my profession, and my professional and ethical obligations to patient care. For me, every time that I perform a professional service I'm trying to lobby for Nurse Anesthetists' practice rights or I'm trying to get the VA to build more beds for homeless patients. Because I'm working at the VA now, VA issues like homeless care, and like the VA Nursing Handbook are important for me because it's all going to come back to access to care for my patients and not just to any care, but access to high-quality anesthesia care that Nurse Anesthetists can provide. I feel that increasing [the] scope of practice for all APRNs will improve the entire medical system that provides care for us and for our families.

SRJ: What are your goals for CANA during your presidency?

CG: Well […], the main goal that I have is to get the internal workings of CANA sharpened up and more efficient and to get everything that we have down on paper to reflect what we are actually doing. In a sense, we are in transition right now internally. We were going to use one kind of governance called Policy Governance and it turns out that didn't work for us, so now we have to go back to Non-Profit Governance. So my main goal has been to tighten that process up and make sure that our governance apparatus is functioning appropriately so that all the pieces that CANA needs to accomplish our professional agenda and objectives (which is advocating for practice rights for Nurse Anesthetists in California) […]is ready and that we are able to plan strategically and do that.

SRJ: When did you first become active with CANA and what was your first professional role within the CANA organization?

CG: Well, actually, I became active with CANA back in the 1980's. At that time I was the Program Director for the UCLA Program of Nurse Anesthesia.

I had gone ahead and gone up through the ranks to become the Program Director of the program that I had graduated from. So I ran for CANA office in the late 1980's and in so doing, although I didn't get elected to office at that point, I did become aware of how important the state association was to all the special objectives that Nurse Anesthetists have. Although I didn't get elected to office, I joined some committees, I started working actively with the different committees, and all through the 80's I was pretty active and into the 90's as well.

SRJ: What would you recommend for SRNAs who want to become professionally involved, but aren't sure how to start?

CG: I think that probably the most important thing is to contact the state association, and your Program Director, and let them know that you're interested, that's the number one thing, and it's easy to do. You just go to the website for CANA and get [the] contact […] number for our Association Manager, Mary Davis. Let her know you're interested. If your Program Director approves, Mary will try to get you on a committee as a student rep and then serve as a student rep and do all that you can and go to meetings. The meetings are so important for students for a number of different reasons. Number one of course, is that the continuing education is wonderful, it gets you up to date with everything. Number two, the networking opportunities where you meet other professionals, you see other CRNAs, you see other students in Nurse Anesthetist programs, and you understand that we […] all share the same common goal of providing high-quality, cost-effective care to our patients and [are] working towards greater access [for] our patients. That is so inspirational to you. Thirdly, for students this may be number one, it helps to start looking around for a job because you're going to be at a meeting with the chiefs, people that run anesthesia departments, and people that are [in] independent practice. You want to get in touch with them because you want to get your name out there.

In closing, I want to thank Dr. Griffis for taking time out of his day to provide an interview with me. I have learned so much through my experience as a

student nurse anesthetist and I am delighted to be a new member of CANA. Our state association has afforded me the opportunity to expand my professional skills and be part of an organization focused on high quality care and patient rights advocacy provided by nurse anesthetists.