

CERTIFIED REGISTERED NURSE ANESTHETISTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA: HEALTH PROFESSION POLICY CHALLENGES

As many of you are aware, 2021 has presented some health human resources policy challenges for our colleagues in British Columbia.

Earlier this year, we learned of the Government of British Columbia's plan to introduce Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) as a new profession in the province, under the guise of their wider plans to eliminate surgical backlogs and improve access to care for British Columbians.

These plans, which require legislative approval and regulatory changes, could be implemented within the next two years, with the first class of CRNAs potentially entering into new educational programs in British Columbia by Fall 2023.

While we believe the Canadian nursing community plays an invaluable role throughout our health system, we vehemently disagree with the introduction of CRNAs as anesthesia providers. They lack the education and training that Canadians have come to expect from anesthesiologists, and their proposed introduction to the system is not only concerning for our profession, but more importantly for the safety of patients requiring surgical care. We firmly believe that the provision of anesthesia services should continue to be the practice domain of the medical profession and that anesthesiologists and their care teams are the service model that continues to meet the health care needs of all Canadians.

We have been working closely with and supporting our colleagues at the British Columbia Anesthesiologists' Society, who have continued to provide constructive feedback and alternatives to the government throughout the engagement process. They will continue to voice their opposition to the provincial Ministry throughout the engagement and legislative processes.

CAS is aware of and supports governments across Canada in their efforts to drive efficiencies throughout the health system, including to reduce surgical wait times. We understand that considerations must include the assessment of scopes of practice and the way that various professions – including anesthesiologists – provide care within the health system.

In the coming months, we will be embarking on a concerted and proactive strategy to raise the profile of anesthesiologists among government decision-makers and share information on the importance of medical professionals within anesthesia care teams. This will include compiling information on best practices from jurisdictions across the country, so we will want to hear from you!

We will be sharing our plan and our progress in the coming weeks and months, and we look forward to your support.