

TO: Members, Wisconsin State Assembly

**FROM: James Mesrobian, MD
WSA Past-President**

DATE: April 14, 2010

**RE: Assembly Bill 671 – Support for Licensure of
Anesthesiologist Assistants**

On behalf of the Wisconsin Society of Anesthesiologists, please vote for Assembly Bill 671, licensure of Anesthesiologist Assistants.

AB 671 received a unanimous vote from the Assembly Committee on Health and Healthcare Reform once amendments were adopted addressing concerns raised by the Wisconsin Association of Nurse Anesthetists (WANA), and moving WANA's position to neutral.

Anesthesiology is a medical specialty of critical importance to patients. Whether removing cancerous tumors, transplanting organs, rebuilding joints, repairing traumatic injuries, or something as "routine" as removing an inflamed appendix, surgery requires anesthesia -- most often "general anesthesia" where powerful drugs render the patient unconscious for the duration of surgery (whether minutes or many hours). These are the obvious examples, but anesthesia is required for many other surgical and medical procedures.

Wisconsin faces a shortage of qualified anesthesia providers now. As the Baby Boom generation advances in age, the population most in need of anesthesia for life saving, life sustaining and life improving medical care is growing dramatically. Left unchanged, the shortage of qualified anesthesia providers will worsen, threatening the ability of our health care system to meet the demand for future surgical, anesthesia and other critical medical services.

AAs are highly educated (Masters Degree) health professionals who specialize in Anesthesiology. AAs work under the supervision of Anesthesiologists providing anesthesia to surgical and other patients. Their long track record in Wisconsin is unblemished. But their hiring outside of LaCrosse and Madison has been hindered by their lack of state licensure. Licensure of AAs will assure hospitals, physicians, patients and policy makers of the educational and training credentials of AAs, the scope of AA practice, and provide state oversight of their profession. And it will remove a significant barrier to their hiring and allow Wisconsin hospitals to recruit more qualified anesthesia providers to address the worsening shortage.

AB 671 would license AAs. Practicing alongside Anesthesiologists and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) in Wisconsin for three decades, AAs are a largely untapped potential that can help address our worsening shortage of qualified anesthesia providers. Passage of AB 671 will not by itself alleviate our shortage, but it will be a positive step and will help Wisconsin get a jump on addressing this problem before it becomes critical. Please vote in favor of AB 671.