

Health Bulletin

Reducing Surgery Risks

(NAPSA)—Obesity takes the blame for many of today's health issues, and here's a new one: Being extremely overweight can raise the risk of complications from anesthesia, according to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA), the professional organization representing more than 44,000 nurse anesthetists.

In recent decades, obesity has become much more common. Studies show that in the United States, three out of 10 adults aged 20 and older are obese, which equals more than 60 million people. Add in people who are overweight but not obese, and 65 percent of the adult population is considered to have a weight problem.

"Obese patients face many possible anesthesia challenges," said Lisa Thiemann, CRNA, MNA, senior director of Professional Practice for the AANA. "However, I'm happy to report that due to ongoing advances in anesthesia technology, drugs, practice standards and professional education, CRNAs are well prepared to handle any complications that might arise."

Complications most commonly associated with giving anesthesia to obese patients involve airway and respiratory management.

The anesthesia process begins with the preanesthetic assessment, where obese patients are counseled before surgery about their increased risk of complications from anesthesia. Patients are strongly encouraged to meet with their anesthesia professional prior to the day of surgery to share vital health care information that can help make the anesthesia experience as safe as possible. Of particular interest to anesthesia professionals is information in the following areas:

- **Respiratory**—General anesthesia places a large amount of stress on the breathing system of



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obese patients. Other respiratory concerns include asthma and sleep apnea.

- **Cardiac**—Increased incidence of heart disease is a common problem associated with obesity.

- **Hypertension**—Many obese patients suffer from high blood pressure.

- **Coexisting disease/conditions**—Obese patients may present a wide range of other health concerns such as diabetes, hypothyroid, gastroesophageal reflux disease and chronic back pain.

"CRNAs stay with their patients through the entire peri-anesthesia process, including inducing sleep, monitoring vital signs, adjusting anesthetic levels and waking the patient after surgery," said Thiemann. "Obesity has become much more common and nurse anesthetists are prepared to assist these patients."

If you ever undergo surgery, the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists can help you better understand the anesthetic process. To learn more about anesthesia, visit www.aana.com or call (847) 692-7050.