

GAO Report: "Payment Changes are Needed for Assistants-at-Surgery"

The following is an excerpt from the GAO Report released recently. For the full report, please go to our website at www.nsaa.net

Members of a wide range of health professions serve as assistants-at-surgery including physicians, residents in training for licensure or board certification in a physician specialty, several different kinds of nurses, and members of several other health professions.

Hospitals employ at the types of different health professionals that perform this role. Hospital employees likely serve as assistants-at-surgery at a majority of the procedures that the American College of Surgeons says an assistant is "almost always necessary". The number of assistants-at-surgery services performed by physicians and paid under the Medicare physician fee schedule has declined, while the number of such services performed by nonphysician health professionals eligible to receive payment under the physician fee schedule has increased.

There is no widely accepted set of uniform requirements for experience and education that the health professionals who serve as assistants-at-surgery are required to meet. The health professions whose members provide assistant-at-surgery services have varying educational requirements. No state licenses all the health professionals who serve as assistants-at-surgery. Furthermore, the certification programs developed by the various nonphysician health professional groups whose members assist at surgery differ. GAO found that there was insufficient information about the quality of care provided by assistants-at-surgery generally, or by a specific type of health professional, to assess the adequacy of the

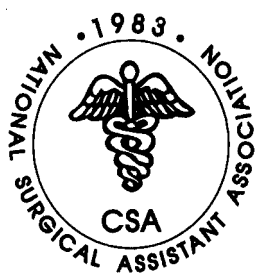
requirement of members of a particular profession to perform the role.

There are three flaws in Medicare's policies for paying assistants-at-surgery that prevent the payment system from meeting the program's goals of making the appropriate payment for medically necessary services by qualified providers. First, because Medicare pays for assistant-at-surgery services under both the hospital

inpatient prospective payment system and the physician fee schedule, and hospital payments for surgical care are not adjusted when an assistant receives payment under the physician fee schedule, Medicare may be paying too much for some hospital surgical care. Second, paying a health professional under the physician fee schedule to be an assistant-at-surgery, instead of

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including this payment in an all-inclusive payment, give neither the hospital nor the surgeon an incentive to use an assistant only when medically necessary. Third, the distinctions between those health professionals eligible for payment as an assistant-at-surgery under the physician fee schedule and those who are not eligible are not based on surgical education or experience as an assistant. Criteria for determining who should be paid as assistants-at-surgery under the physician fee schedule do not exist. However, hospitals are responsible under health and safety rules to provide quality care for their patients.



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NSAA Executive Director and Lobbyists Meets with NAASP - Surgical Assistants in the UK

Ruth Helein, NSAA Executive Director along with Steve Halsey and Laurie Rains of Halsey, Rains and Associates traveled to the UK to meet with the recently formed Surgical Assistant group - the National Association of Assistants in Surgical Practice. This group is truly the counterpart to the CSA! They have worked hard to formulate an excellent educational program - and are growing and gaining recognition within their country! NSAA offered its experience and expertise in certification, along with our wish to affiliate with them in some concrete way. The "Brits" were very receptive to our suggestions and showed us wonderful hospitality! This alliance will help promote the profession throughout the world!

We will be meeting again with their National Chairperson, Jill Biggins, in early summer to formulate ways our two organizations can interact.

Assistants in Surgical Practice in the UK are specialty oriented, but are interested in ways to have a more well rounded scope of practice. Their skill level is extremely high - giving the "advanced level" expertise of the CSA! This coalition is very exciting for both of our groups!

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GAO

The important information in this GAO report is clearly stated - placing the CSA on a "level" playing field in the profession. The report gives the CSA recognition as a nationally accepted credential for the profession of Non Physician Surgical Assistant! This will help move NSAA forward in our quest for Medicare/

Medicaid

reimbursement!

The report gives the CSA recognition as a nationally accepted credential....

Get Involved!

Much is happening in the profession and within the Association! Now is the time to get involved.....educate those around you about the CSA credential, encourage colleagues to sit for our certification examination, find out

Exam Questions Sought!

NSAA is looking for more examination questions. Our goal is to have a databank of over 2,000 questions for our randomized exam! We are asking all members to submit questions...your questions must be reviewed by a physician/surgeon prior to submission to the national office. Simply write your question, ask one of your surgeons to review them - and then submit them along with the surgeon's name and information, as well as reference to the text the questions came from, or if they are practitioner based, give explanation or background on the question(s). Each question that is submitted and used for the examination will be worth 2 CEUs! This is a great way to be involved in your association!

Annual Conference to be held in Chicago!

Have you registered to attend the Annual Conference? It is never too late! The meeting will be held April 23-25, 2004 - at the Radisson Hotel & Suites, 160 E. Huron, Chicago! This meeting promises to be packed with information, education, networking - and great things to do in an exciting city! Don't delay - call the National office today to register! Call toll free - **888-633-0479**.

For more information and the full conference program visit our website at www.nsaa.net!





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