



## Review

## The global organization of nurses in anesthesia: The International Federation of Nurse Anesthetists

Vera Meeusen <sup>a,\*</sup>, Sandy Ouellette <sup>b</sup>, Betty Horton <sup>c</sup>, the IFNA Board of Officers<sup>1</sup><sup>a</sup> 8/170 Bowen Terrace, New Farm-Brisbane, QLD 4005, Australia<sup>b</sup> 183 Heatherton Way, Winston Salem, NC 27104, USA<sup>c</sup> 1262 E. 1000 North Rod, Tower Hill, IL 62571, USA

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## ABSTRACT

World-wide, nurse anesthetists provide anesthesia care in many countries. Because of different historical background responsibilities, tasks and roles vary widely around the world. Established in 1989, the International Federation of Nurse Anesthetists (IFNA) is a global organization representing nurse anesthetists. Each member country is represented in the Council of National Representatives who elect their Board of Officers who manage IFNA on a day-to-day basis. Together with several committees, the IFNA is dedicated to the advancement of educational standards and practices that will advance the art and science of nurse anesthesia and thereby support and enhance quality anesthesia worldwide. The IFNA has relationships with numerous institutions that share the professional interest in nurse anesthesia: International Council of Nurses, World Health Organization, World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists (WFSA) and European Society of Anesthesiology. The IFNA-Standards, the Anesthesia Program Approval Process and the IFNA-world congresses are important tools used in the globalization process. Currently, the focus is on a framework and guidelines for Continuous Professional Development, recertification, accreditation and legislation. This is not only important for further development of the profession and the constant improvement of quality anesthesia care but also to become known to the general public.

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [verameeusen44@gmail.com](mailto:verameeusen44@gmail.com) (V. Meeusen), [souellette@triad.rr.com](mailto:souellette@triad.rr.com) (S. Ouellette), [bettyhorton10@gmail.com](mailto:bettyhorton10@gmail.com) (B. Horton).<sup>1</sup> IFNA, [www.ifna.site](http://www.ifna.site), Email: [ifna.rod@wanadoo.fr](mailto:ifna.rod@wanadoo.fr).

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## 1. Introduction

Nurse Anesthetists (NAs) currently provide much of anesthesia care world-wide. Studies have illustrated NA administer or participate in administration of anesthesia services in 107 countries and in 70–80% of all cases administered in the world. Responsibilities, tasks and roles have differed widely across nurse anesthetists around the world [1]. National organization and international integration have been of critical importance in enhancing the growth and protection of the scope of practice for the specialty.

The International Federation of Nurse Anesthetists (IFNA) is a global organization representing nurse anesthetists. The nurse anesthetist has completed a program of basic nursing education and basic nurse anesthesia education and is qualified and authorized in his/her country to practice as a nurse anesthesia. IFNA is dedicated to the advancement of educational and practice standards which will advance the art and science of nurse anesthetist and thereby support and enhance quality patient care.

## 2. Historical overview

In order to understand the challenges nurse anesthetists (NAs) are facing today, it is essential to look back to the early days of anesthesia. Induction of anesthesia, traditionally, was performed by the surgeon while a nurse took over during maintenance of anesthesia. The surgeon was ultimately responsible for the entire operation, including the ‘anesthesia’.

NAs have been providing anesthesia care in the United States and in some European countries for nearly 150 years and were the first “nursing specialty group”. Society forces, gender, war, economy, education, certification and organization issues all had a powerful effect on the development of NAs as a nursing specialty.

World War II accelerated the specialisation of medicine and gave great impetus to anesthesia as a medical specialty. Before the introduction of muscle relaxants, induction agents, potent inhalational agents, anesthesia-specific medications, anesthesia delivery systems and regional anesthesia modalities, anesthesiologists had to fight for their position in a predominantly surgical world and

against a large general practitioner workforce. Nowadays, in the European Union anesthesia is recognized as a medical specialty and anesthesia nurse is always working under the supervision and responsibility of an anesthesiologist.

Generally, the development of nurse anesthetists worldwide occurred in four possible ways: a) as in the USA where NAs work independently or under supervision of a physician; b) as in France where nurses first worked under supervision of the physician and later under supervision of the anesthesiologist; c) as in the UK (and Commonwealth) where physicians were the sole administrators of anesthesia and were assisted by different types of assistants (incl. nurses) or d) as in Germany where nurses worked under supervision of the surgeon, then were completely replaced by anesthesiologists and later were reintroduced to assist the anesthesiologist [2,3].

## 3. International federation of nurse anesthetists

In 1978 two European NA, one from Switzerland and one from Denmark, attended the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Their interest in international cooperation among NA planted the seed for what would become the International Federation of Nurse Anesthetists. Following symposiums held in Switzerland (1985) and the Netherlands (1988) interest increased for a formal international organization. In September 1988, the first organization meeting of the proposed international organization was held in Teufen, Switzerland. Subcommittees were formed to discuss structure, bylaws, membership, dues, functions, and objectives. In June 1989, country representatives met in Teufen, Switzerland, to finalize and adopt proposed bylaws and to review country applications. On June 10, 1989, 11 countries became charter members of IFNA [4].

They are: Austria, Germany, Finland, France, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, Switzerland, United States and the former Yugoslavia. During their first meeting, 10th of June 1989, in Teufen (Switzerland) bylaws were accepted, officers were elected and the Swiss city of St. Gallen was chosen as IFNA headquarters [5]. Ongoing efforts in areas such as education, practice and ethical standards, and the accreditation of education programs create opportunities for IFNA-country members for further legalization and professionalization. This is not only important for further development of the profession but also to become known to the general public.

The IFNA world congresses are essential for the coherence, innovation and exchange between non-medical anesthesia professionals worldwide. In 1985, even before the official launch of the IFNA, an International Symposium for Nurse Anesthetists was held in Lucerne, Switzerland with a total of 282 participants from 11 different countries [4]. In 2016 the eleventh IFNA congress will be held in Glasgow, UK (Table 1).

### 3.1. Mission & vision

The Federation is dedicated to the precept that its members are committed to the advancement of educational standards and practices that will advance the art and science of nurse anesthesia and thereby support and enhance quality anesthesia

**Table 1**  
IFNA world congresses.

Date	Location	N (participants)
1985	Lucerne, Switzerland	282
1988	Amsterdam, Netherlands	511
1991	Oslo, Norway	1100
1994	Paris, France	2600
1997	Vienna, Austria	1700
2000	Chicago, USA	4384
2002	Helsinki, Finland	1047
2006	Lausanne, Switzerland	1278
2010	Den Hague, Netherlands	1012
2012	Ljubljana, Slovenia	634
2014	Tunis, Tunisia	Cancelled (unstable situation)
2016	Glasgow, United Kingdom	

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