Anesthesia best left to experts
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In response to the July 20 article, “Colorado court: Nurses can provide anesthesia” by Steven K. Paulson:

On July 19, the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled that nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) can anesthetize Colorado’s citizens without physician supervision. As a physician and an anesthesiologist in Northern Colorado, I was disturbed by this decision, because my goal is to provide the safest anesthetic possible for members of my community, and the safest anesthetic is either performed by or supervised by a physician.

As leaders in patient safety, anesthesiologists are physicians (MDs or DOs) who have completed 4 years of undergraduate work, 4 years of medical school and 4 years of anesthesia residency training. Some anesthesiologists also have completed 1-year fellowships in specialized areas like pediatric or cardiac anesthesia. In addition, we have to take written and oral boards to earn our board certification in anesthesiology.

Interestingly, the Court of Appeals stated, “In reaching our conclusion, we do not minimize the able arguments made by the doctors and amici curiae that anesthesiologists receive considerably more education and training than nurse anesthetists, and therefore are much better equipped to respond to emergencies and unexpected difficulties during surgery. However, our role is limited to determining whether Colorado law permits CRNAs to administer anesthesia without physician supervision. We may not pass on the wisdom of the decision to allow CRNAs to do so.”

I currently work for Northern Colorado Anesthesia Professional Consultants, which provides anesthesia for both Poudre Valley Hospital and Medical Center of the Rockies and for several Northern Colorado surgery centers. Our goal is to provide safe anesthesia utilizing one of two models: physician-only or physician supervision of nurse anesthetists. These models provide cost-effective, safe anesthesia.

As a board member of the Colorado Society of Anesthesiologists and a state delegate to the American Society of Anesthesiologists, we have several options to the court’s decision: first, we can appeal to the Colorado Supreme Court; and second, we can work with the Colorado General Assembly to enact legislation stating that the delivery of anesthesia care is the practice of medicine and must be performed by or supervised by a physician.

As a citizen, what would you want for yourself or for your family?

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