

To the editor:

As President of the Colorado Society of Anesthesiologists (CSA) I must comment on your article “Drug-addicted, dangerous and licensed for the operating room,” (April 24) regarding health care workers suffering from substance abuse. Focusing on tragic and criminal events, it maligned efforts of state medical and nursing boards to treat professionals afflicted by addiction with compassion and support.

To identify and treat substance abuse within the medical profession, all 50 states currently have programs whereby physicians affected can refer themselves or be referred for treatment in a non-punitive environment; a system more effective at rehabilitation and return to work. Studies estimate that physicians and nurses have no greater risk of substance abuse than the general public. The Colorado Physician Health Program is a model of an effective, supervised, and monitored program for physicians.

CSA recently testified before the Colorado House and Senate committees considering the sunset of current law under which surgical technicians are registered. We support retaining the current law and strengthening the patient protections in it. Those identified in the article as exposing patients to contaminated needles were surgical technicians.

The American Medical Association designates substance abuse as a disease. The CSA vigorously agrees that knowingly passing blood-borne diseases to innocent victims is criminal. We also feel that efforts to treat and rehabilitate addicted physicians so they can return to productive lives should not be denigrated.

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