

# SCSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2022

By Margarita M. Pate, PhD

As Covid impacted all of us the last 3 years, we have not had a business meeting since 2019. In lieu of minutes, I am submitting the following Director's Report with what the society has been doing and what we anticipate going forward this year.

## Membership

The total number of anesthesiologists in SC is a hard number to know accurately. LLR does not keep updated data. They include physicians that are not active, retired, moved away, have a license in SC but do not practice here, and even deceased physicians.

The ASA only keeps track of physicians who are members of the ASA.

DHEC may have the most accurate list of active, practicing SC physicians from the number of SCDEA licenses. However, the public does not have access to that information. So, what I do is estimate from the LLR numbers, extrapolating what I know is happening in the state.

There are 1147 anesthesiologists according to LLR that have SC licenses. I subtract 30% for 'errors' and I arrive at an estimate of 803 practicing anesthesiologists in SC.

LLR lists eighty-six pain medicine specialists, which is twice the number, according to the Pain Society of the Carolinas (PSOC.)

The SCSA has 508 active physician members. That is 63% of the total available for membership. We have had higher numbers, as a percentage, in the past. I attribute that to so many physicians becoming employed by the hospitals and the hospitals not taking care to pay the dues. I receive fewer group checks, so I have to 'chase' the dues, unfortunately.

We have 99% membership of AAs in SC.

## SCSAPAC

The SCSAPAC donation rate is steady at around 4-5% of membership. This is typical of political action committee donations. We had a remarkably busy year with the recent legislative battle, so we both spent higher than usual, and received higher than usual donations. (See attached financial statement.)

## Legislative Affairs

As you all know, this past session of the General Assembly (2021-22) was an active one for us. Fortunately, it was also a successful session. We managed to defeat the efforts of the nurse anesthetists to gain independent practice. For the first time, a bill made it to the floor of the House, but we had the overwhelming majority of votes to stop the bill. Some maneuvering by House leadership both stopped the bill and upset most of the 3M Committee. Our lobbying team did an outstanding job whipping the votes, and when the dust settled, we won!

The leadership of the House for 2022-23 includes several good friends of ours, such as the new Speaker Murrell Smith, new Majority Leader Davey Hiott, Rep. Jay West, among others. We also made some new friends thanks to the outreach of our members.

This process also exposed who was against us. Top of that list is the Chairman of the 3M Committee and his chief of staff (Chairman Leon Howard and Mary Denis Cauthen), as well as 2 House members who both lost their seats (Wendy Brawley and Jonathon Hill). We did gain added support from Democrats, both on the 3M Committee and in the Democratic Caucus, in general.

While the SC General Assembly is solidly Republican, the Democratic Caucus is not to be ignored. We helped our efforts tremendously by respecting the leadership of the Democratic Caucus and its members. Leader Gilda Cobb-Hunter supported us in the fight against the nurses' bill. She was very instrumental in gaining Democratic support for us.

Governor Henry McMaster has supported us since he has been in office, in terms of not seeking an opt-out and indicating that he would not support an independent practice bill. We have continued to support Governor McMaster in return.

### Next Session

While the recent defeat in the House would deter most groups, we are not going to assume that the nurses will stop their efforts. The lobbying team and I have already started preparing for the next legislative session. We are in communication with both the House leadership and the Senate. Senator Tom Davis, who supports all mid-level providers, is on the top of our 'stay in touch with' list. Senator Davis was the sponsor of the nurses' bill, but also the one who did not let the bill move forward. He is also the sponsor of the AA bill.

The AA bill did not move out of subcommittee last session. It will be reintroduced for the 2023-24 Legislative Session. The SCSA fully supports the bill to expand the supervision ratio of MD:AA from the current 1:2 to 1:4.

We have an excellent lobbying group: our long-standing lead lobbyist is Graham Tew. In addition to Graham, we have Drew Clawson (an outstanding young lobbyist), Jason Puhlasky (he has been around many years and has many important friends in the General Assembly, and impressively worked the House the day of the vote) and Damon Jeter (our newest lobbyist who single handedly got the Democratic House Caucus on our side).

## LLR Activity

The SCSA has made several inquiries to the BON regarding the activity of nurse anesthetists.

- 1) Can CRNAs use the term ‘nurse anesthesiologist’ in South Carolina (written or oral)?

Answer: The BON, at their May 2022 meeting, voted unanimously, with one abstention that CRNAs may NOT use the term ‘nurse anesthesiologist.’ A big win for truth and transparency.

- 2) Can CRNAs practice pain medicine?

Answer: The BON heard testimony on this issue, as information only. No motion was made, which means that without a motion, the status remains that CRNAs can NOT practice pain medicine in South Carolina.

- 3) Can CRNAs provide cosmetic procedures, such as Botox and other procedures?

Answer: This issue was also for information only. The BON discussed this and the pain medicine question in executive session. No decision was announced, and no further information was forthcoming. This issue has also come before the BME. The BME has already issued some cautionary statements against the practice of “Botox and bubbles” in particular. It is not clear at this point, if the BME and the BON are going to address this issue in a more formal way.

## ASA Annual Meeting

The ASA Annual Meeting will be held October 21-25, in New Orleans. The SCSA will be hosting a cocktail hour for all the SC attendees.

This year’s most talked about issue is the response by the ASA to the Supreme Court’s Dodds decision regarding abortion. The various ASA committees have been working on a position statement from the ASA, on behalf of its members, in response to the Supreme Court decision.

The SCSA has five delegates to the ASA House of Delegates, which will address the ASA statement. Please let your delegates know what your position is on this issue, and any other business before the House of Delegates. The following are the ASA Delegates for this year:

Thomas Phillips, MD, FASA (Spartanburg)  
Katie Bridges, MD, FASA (Charleston)  
Kevin Walker, MD, FASA (Greenville)  
William Daniel Young, MD (Charleston)  
Kristin Hoffman, MD (Columbia)

Resident Delegates: Tiffanie Aiken, MD (Myrtle Beach) and Ornella Oluwole, MD (MUSC)

### Reimbursement Issues

SC Medicaid continues to be the lowest payor in the market. While that is reasonable, the SC rate is far out of parity with what they pay other physician providers. The SCSA has been working with the SC Department of Health and Human Services for more than 25 years to close the parity gap. We have managed to convince the Agency to not reduce our reimbursement at the same rate as they have other physician providers over the years, and we have managed to keep our labor epidural rate in line with the State Health Plan. We are awaiting a recent request to increase our unit rate.

### Workers Compensation

The SC Workers Compensation Commission is not going to increase our rate. We have been presenting before the Commission every year for the last 20 years. The SCWCC has taken the position that as long as anesthesiologists accept the rate, they will not increase it.

The only solution for us is to go to the General Assembly. The problem is that to increase our rate, the cost increase would mean higher premiums for the employers of South Carolina, and the General Assembly is not likely to support us over the Chamber of Commerce.

The physician groups that receive fair reimbursement are the orthopedists and physical medicine physicians. To pay us fairly, those two groups would need to take less. In fact, the year that we were the closest to correcting the problem, the orthopedists voted against our request.

### ASA Grants

The SCSA submitted a grant request in 2022 for our efforts to defeat the nurses' bill and to increase the AA supervision ratio. The ASA awarded the SCSA \$30,000 towards those efforts.

The SCSA also applied for the ASA state components award program. The application cited the success of the SCSA in defeating the nurses' independent practice bill in the General Assembly. The ASA awarded the SCSA with the midsize components award at the August ASA Board meeting in Chicago. The SCSA received a \$1500 award.

### Officers for 2022-23

President:	Joshua Smith, MD, FASA
President Elect:	Victoria Ridgeway-Pollard, MD, FASA
1 <sup>st</sup> VP:	Brian Thompson, MD, FASA
2 <sup>nd</sup> VP:	William Daniel Young, MD (to be elected)

Sec/Treasurer:	Michelle Rovner, MD, FASA
ASA Director:	Jennifer Root, MD, FASA
ASA Alt. Director:	Laura Roberts, MD, FASA
Immediate Past President:	Thomas Phillips, MD, FASA

### New Website

The SCSA launched a new website in 2022. The website is more user friendly and makes paying dues and SCSAPAC contributions much easier. Members may set up monthly auto drafts for their SCSAPAC dues. Members may also elect to opt out of receiving emails and other notifications.

### Member Accolades:

Christopher Yeakel, MD, FASA, President of the SCMA