

Working Together to Promote Kidney Health

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To improve care for the more than 37 million Americans living with kidney diseases, the American Nephrology Nurses Association (ANNA) and the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) decided in 2023 to deepen their collaborative working relationship. The leaders of both societies began holding a series of in-person and virtual meetings, including a joint leadership summit in December 2023, to identify issues of mutual interest, reach agreement on how best to collaborate to address these topics, and develop a strong bond to ensure this partnership continues in the future.

Collaboration between ANNA and ASN is natural, given that the members of both societies are colleagues who work closely together with a common commitment to improve kidney health in the United States and beyond. By partnering, ANNA and ASN can help accomplish their respective missions of improving “members’ lives through education, advocacy, networking, and sci-

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The American Nephrology Nurses Association (ANNA) and American Society of Nephrology (ASN) have joined forces with the goal of advancing improvements in kidney care through transformative change. Through the integration of expertise, resources, and networks from both organizations, these collaborations have the potential to improve patient outcomes, advance clinical practice, and shape policy initiatives. In this article, we describe our focus on three areas: strengthening the nephrology and nephrology nursing workforce, championing health care equity, and advocating for kidney health.

Keywords:

Nephrology workforce, health care equity, kidney health advocacy.

ence” (ANNA, n.d.) and elevating kidney care “by educating and informing, driving breakthroughs and innovation, and advocating for policies that create transformative changes in kidney medicine throughout the world” (ASN, n.d). In addition to improving communication and achieving common goals, the collaboration between ANNA and ASN offers unique opportunities for both the societies and their members to learn from each other.

Finding areas of collaboration also helps clarify the respective priorities of both organizations. During the joint leadership discussions, ANNA and ASN leaders developed several shared priorities (see Table 1) that will be better advanced together. Additionally, aligning nephrologists and nephrology nurses should result in stronger relationships across the entire interprofessional kidney care team (e.g., pharmacists, advanced practice providers – nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dietitians, social workers, patient care technicians, transplant coordinators).

Table 1
Top Goals of the Collaboration

First	Improve the kidney care workforce.
Second	Advocate together for any legislative and regulatory changes needed to support the workforce.
Third	Enhance the diversity, equity and inclusion of the kidney workforce and advancing equity in kidney diseases and justice in kidney care.

Table 2
ANNA and ASN Representatives and Offices Held in 2023

Office	ANNA	ASN
President	Jennifer Payton	Michelle Josephson
President Elect	Nancy Colobong-Smith	Deidra Crews
Incoming President-Elect	Faith Lynch	Prabir Roy-Chaudhury
Organization Executive Leaders	Michele Kimball	Tod Ibrahim

Following a model that worked well in strengthening ASN's relationships with the European Renal Association and the International Society of Nephrology, the respective president, president-elect, past president, and chief executive staff officer for each society started participating in the joint leadership discussions in 2023 (see Table 2). Because ANNA and ASN have different leadership transition cycles, this model ensures continuity, creates dyads between individuals in the same roles (such as the two presidents), and allows for future planning.

For 2024, 2025, and 2026, ANNA and ASN have agreed to focus on three important areas: 1) strengthening the kidney care team by addressing concerns about the nephrology workforce; 2) promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as health care justice; and 3) advocating for policies that improve kidney health. Exploring each of these areas illustrates how ANNA and ASN are stronger together.

Strengthening the Nephrology Workforce

During the past 20 years, nursing students, medical students, and residents have experienced decreasing exposure to nephrology, while at the same time, the number of people living with kidney diseases, including kidney failure, has increased dramatically. As a result, the gap between the number of nephrologists, nephrology nurses, and other health professionals qualified to care for people living with kidney diseases and the millions of people who deserve the highest-quality kidney care possible has never been wider (Parker et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2013).

Both ANNA and ASN recognize that pipeline challenges exist for future clinicians, researchers, educators, and administrators. The societies must redouble their efforts to attract the next generation of nephrologists,

nephrology nurses, PhD scientists, and other kidney health professionals. In fact, workforce was the focus of the ANNA Chief Nursing Officer Meeting at the ANNA National Symposium in Spring 2024. Grassroots efforts to excite trainees were discussed, as well as barriers to sustain the needed nursing workforce, including new opportunities that enable remote work but erode the existing workforce.

ANNA and ASN are united in the goal of achieving a robust nephrology workforce. This future workforce must be able to address the complex needs of our growing patient population, understand the many new therapies for treating people living with kidney diseases earlier, and improve their lives through better kidney health. By coordinating efforts, ANNA and ASN can learn from each other, develop aligned messaging, and leverage each other's local, regional, and national platforms. For example, one joint effort under consideration is having members of ASN participate in an ANNA campaign about the excitement of the nephrology nursing field to encourage people to enter the field. Additionally, ASN has a nephrology campaign called United 4 Kidney Health (ASN, 2024), which is "an awareness-building initiative... to educate nephrologists, other kidney health professionals, and scientists about the dramatic changes and new opportunities taking place in kidney care, research, and education, and enhance their professional development, and training" (p. 1). In another example, ASN is currently applying strategies used successfully by ANNA to engage members.

Championing Health Care Equity

A disproportionate number of people with kidney disease are Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx,

Indigenous or Native American, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders. They also have a higher incidence of lower socioeconomic status. Disparities such as these in kidney health for these Americans are not acceptable (Crews, 2024a; Gadegbeku et al., 2021).

Acknowledging that all kidney health policy should be rooted in the principle of justice, it is incumbent upon all kidney health professionals to seek just and equitable social conditions for their patients, their colleagues, and their community. Health equity is a foundational value to ANNA's mission because it impacts both the society's members and the communities they serve. As a mature professional society with respect to workforce diversity and health equity efforts, ASN distinguishes its workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts separately from its health equity and health care justice efforts. This approach allows ASN to identify opportunities to enhance the nephrology workforce while also addressing the needs of populations at disparate risk for and overburdened with kidney diseases.

As ANNA continues to strive to weave diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into the infrastructure and member experience, there is an opportunity to partner with long-time associates at ASN to collaborate on topics of shared interest in this arena.

At least three areas are ripe for ANNA and ASN to pursue related to these topics. First, limited literature is available that demonstrates the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the nephrologist and nephrology nursing workforces, and this type of data will become increasingly important as federal policies have changed regarding efforts such as affirmative action. ANNA and ASN could address this data gap, which would help garner support for programs and policies that enhance diversity in our fields (Crews 2024b).

Second, because sponsorship is often lacking but is vitally important for the career advancement of professionals from backgrounds underrepresented in health care, ANNA and ASN can partner on identifying career-promoting opportunities (such as job placement, specialized training, speaking opportunities, and leadership opportunities) for members of each society. And third, ANNA and ASN can bolster joint advocacy efforts for policy changes that could support a more diverse nephrology and nephrology nursing workforce.

Opportunities for ANNA and ASN to partner to advance health care justice are, likewise, extensive. Collaboratively, the societies can highlight the importance of health care justice and the impacts of adverse social determinants of health on individuals living with kidney disease. Together, ANNA and ASN can advocate on a larger scale for legislation that addresses these inequities. ANNA and ASN can promote implementation research where models of multidisciplinary care teams are studied toward ensuring newer therapies for kidney health are accessible to all and not just the most socioeco-

nomically advantaged. This work would be timely, as newer and emerging payment models for U.S. kidney care have explicit aims surrounding health equity.

Advocating for Kidney Health

Advocacy initiatives within the realm of nephrology can be significantly bolstered through collaborative endeavors, such as the coordinated organization of "Take Action Days" on legislative priorities and the integration of in-person advocacy events on Capitol Hill that include strategic write-ins. By aligning efforts between ANNA and ASN, these joint actions can amplify the voice of the kidney community and advocate for crucial legislative changes.

Key priorities include advancing the field of transplantation, advocating for increased utilization and accessibility of home dialysis modalities (such as peritoneal dialysis and home hemodialysis), and enhancing access to vascular access procedures for patients undergoing kidney replacement therapy, and slowing the progression of kidney diseases. Through unified advocacy efforts, ANNA and ASN can effectively engage policymakers, raise awareness about the importance of these initiatives, and ultimately drive positive changes that benefit both patients and health care providers within the nephrology field. In fact, ANNA and ASN have more than a decade of history collaborating on public policy goals through several kidney care-related advocacy coalitions and joint Capitol Hill days, momentum both organizations look forward to building on moving forward.

Kidney Transplantation

Kidney transplant policies are evolving more quickly at this moment in time than they have in the last 40 years since the National Organ Transplant Act, and they are advancing in exciting, patient-centered ways. ANNA and ASN can contribute by advocating for robust Congressional funding for the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which is in the process of implementing the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Modernization Initiative (HRSA, 2024). This Initiative, which is aimed at making the transplant system more transparent, accountable, and better able to enable more people to receive a kidney transplant, is itself an opportunity for ANNA and ASN to engage with the Biden administration to ensure the organizations' priorities on behalf of people waiting for a kidney, their families, and their care teams, are advanced.

Kidney Disease Education

Through coalition efforts, both ANNA and ASN have long promoted expansion of eligibility for the Kidney Disease Education (KDE) benefit to people with chronic kidney disease stages 3b and 5 (at present, only those with stage 4 are eligible). This benefit presents a uniquely important opportunity to provide people with education on how to slow the progression of kidney diseases. It also

gives them an opportunity to consider which modality choice might be right for them—including home peritoneal dialysis and home hemodialysis—should they progress to kidney failure, with the added benefit of a waiver for the benefit's co-pay. Under the auspices of ANNA and ASN's formal collaboration, the organizations will jointly champion access to the KDE benefit.

Advances in Nephrology

Numerous innovative companies are pioneering advancements in various nephrology areas. For example, there is work being done to transform vascular access technology. Innovators in this arena include several members of the Kidney Health Initiative, the public-private partnership with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) established by ASN, of which ANNA is a member. However, questions abound regarding how, if having cleared the FDA regulatory process, novel vascular access products will fare in terms of coverage and payment at Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). ANNA and ASN are well-positioned to advocate for predictable, consistent CMS processes for adoption of innovative devices (and drugs), such as vascular access technologies, with the ultimate goal of ensuring patients with kidney disease can benefit from these advancements. In particular, there has to date been a paucity of innovation in the area of cannulation devices in order to avoid pain, infiltration, and other cannulation-associated complications that destroy patients' quality of life. ANNA members are at the front lines of the cannulation procedure, and their input and advocacy in this area will hopefully focus attention on this relatively ignored area of vascular access.

Recognizing the imperative of slowing or stopping the progression to kidney failure and the remarkable promise of new therapies, such as sodium-glucose cotransporter 2 inhibitors (SGLT-2 inhibitors), mineralocorticoid receptor antagonists (MRAs), and glucagon-like peptide-1 agonists GLP-1 analogues, to achieve that once-elusive goal for many patients, ANNA and ASN also plan to advocate with CMS and other payers to ensure every patient who would benefit can access these medications. For example, ASN is currently generating data to make the economic case to support screening people at risk for kidney diseases, ensuring these patients receive the care they need as early as possible, and also doing everything possible to slow the progression of kidney disease (and promote kidney health).

Working Together

By fostering synergistic relationships across personal, professional, educational, research, policy, and quality spheres, the ANNA-ASN collaboration is poised to drive transformative advancements in kidney care. Through the integration of expertise, resources, and networks from both organizations, these collaborations have the poten-

tial to revolutionize the landscape of nephrology, improving patient outcomes, advancing clinical practice, and shaping policy initiatives.

It is important, however, to have opportunities for local interactions between ASN and ANNA members where knowledge and clinical experiences could be shared outside of the busy work environment. ANNA and ASN plan to leverage their members in both metropolitan and rural areas to organize "kidney health forums" with didactic and interactive offerings on common areas of clinical interest. Above all, these forums would serve as a meeting place for ANNA and ASN members to identify opportunities to improve kidney health and also identify barriers to the same at a local level that could be broken down together.

By working together, ANNA and ASN can leverage their collective strengths to address complex challenges in kidney care, paving the way for innovative solutions and lasting impact. Ultimately, the power of collaboration between ANNA and ASN holds the key to unlocking new frontiers in nephrology, ushering in a future of improved quality of life for patients with kidney disease.

Collaborative efforts between ANNA and ASN offer a powerful platform for advancing kidney care, research, and education through the strategic utilization of interconnected networks. By harnessing the power of collaboration across diverse domains, ANNA and ASN can synergistically address complex challenges in nephrology. Through joint initiatives, the societies can amplify advocacy efforts, enhance patient care, and foster innovation.

ANNA's expertise in nursing and patient care delivery and ASN's strengths in research and clinical practice complement each other, creating a fertile ground for interdisciplinary collaboration. This synergy enables the development and dissemination of evidence-based practices, educational resources, and policy recommendations that drive improvements in kidney health outcomes. By leveraging their collective resources, expertise, and networks, ANNA and ASN can catalyze transformative change in kidney care, research, and education, ultimately benefiting patients, health care providers, and the broader nephrology community.

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