



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Roots of Knowledge, Seeds of Transformation: The Ecology of Perianesthesia Practice

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Ecology is, broadly, the study of relationships: interactions between organisms and every other thing, living or non-living, in contact with the organism. In a sense, knowledge of such relationships often uncovers the reasons that associations exist and reveals how these connections might be evolving.

This is similar to the process of organizational strategic planning: discovery of why our organization exists and where it is moving as a specialty association, and identification of challenges faced and opportunities available for a healthy and continued existence. The aspen tree, solid yet bendable, tall but touchable, serves as a powerful symbol to represent the ecology of ASPAN and perianesthesia nursing practice.

Established Roots

Chosen wisely by our founding members, the aspen leaf serves as the perfect image for perianesthesia practice. The natural life cycle of the aspen tree provides a wonderful eco-transformation metaphor for not-for-profit organizations like ASPAN, and explains the ecology of survival. Parallels exist between the nature of aspen trees and the business of ASPAN.

The aspen tree is one of the most widely distributed trees in the world. Large fields of aspen trees cover virtually the entire northern forest. The forests are scattered like perianesthesia nurses across the globe. The woodlands are home to diverse members, some tall, some short, some young, and some old. Many trees have similar characteristics to the aspen tree, but cannot be called an aspen tree without the entire biological profile.

In the same way, many organizations will have characteristics similar to ASPAN, but none can provide the scope of services and products that ASPAN provides. Scanning our countryside and exploring the landscape, ASPAN employs strategies to review and modify ways in which to proactively improve resources for practice, education and research. Such ongoing activities better define the differentiation process that occurs naturally. In other words, ASPAN remains the essential resource for perianesthesia nursing.

The nearly round leaf of the aspen tree, with a perimeter of tiny irregular rounded teeth, has an unusual ability to twist and bend allowing the leaf to flutter in the lightest wind. This allows the tree to optimize photosynthesis and protects the tree from severe winds by dissipating energy. Similarly, resilient perianesthesia nurses have broadened the scope of our practice and adapted to changing needs of patients and healthcare paradigms. Flexibility is as vital as is remaining attached to the source. A leaf blown from the aspen tree is like a perianesthesia nurse without the fundamental support of colleagues or the ASPAN network.

Season of Renewal

The aspen tree profusely regenerates after external threats and, in adverse conditions, remains strong by adaptation. There are multiple threats in healthcare that unfavorably impact our day-to-day practice and ASPAN operations. Regardless of external pressures impacting perianesthesia practice, this organization is positioned to provide the essential resources and support to adapt and move forward.

Aspen forests actually benefit from environmental hazards, natural or otherwise. Fires allow the underground seedling to thrive in the sunlight offered by burned horizons. External threats to ASPAN serve the same function, allowing seeds of transformation to bloom where planted and replenish the fields of the Society.

*Roots of knowledge: To advance the unique specialty of perianesthesia nursing.*¹

The aspen tree grows by developing new shoots that spread from a parent tree's roots. As the tree ages and dies, its roots survive underground, allowing new shoots to continue the growth process. They stay connected underground, even as the shoots mature. This is the survival strategy of the aspen tree. Our survival as an organization also depends on the ability to grow new shoots that support our foundation and keep our forest strong.

Membership recruitment and retention is a vital survival approach. In ASPAN's past, many nurses served to lead, teach and care for us and our loved ones. They established a legacy of strength. As perianesthesia leaders, mentoring and succession planning must also robustly continue to grow our future.

ASPAN is not a lone tree in the forest. ASPAN is the forest. In the shadow of ASPAN, we grow. As our root system, ASPAN keeps us connected. Now is a natural time in its life cycle to assure balance in ASPAN's ecosystem. We can do this by ensuring that its nourishment is healthy and the programs and services ASPAN provides sustain each member. We will carefully generate new shoots, provide the energy needed to grow stronger, and recognize and celebrate firmly planted roots.

We would be most wise to follow Advice from a Tree: "Stand tall and proud, sink your roots deeply into the Earth ... seek nourishment from the good things in life, simple pleasures, earth, fresh air, light ... let your limbs sway and dance in the breezes, be flexible, remember your roots."²

REFERENCES

1. American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses. Thinking and planning strategically. Cherry Hill, NJ: ASPAN; 2007.
2. Shamir I. Advice from a Tree. Available at <http://www.treelink.org/woodnotes/vol1/no1/advice.htm>. Accessed April 9, 2009.

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