

Registered Nurses as First Assistants in Surgery

The Oregon State Board of Nursing acknowledges that it is within the role and the scope of practice for a registered nurse to perform the duties of first assistant in surgery. The registered nurse, before offering his/her services as a first assistant, must have demonstrated competency through specialized preparation and experience to function in this role. It is the Board's belief that the specialized preparation should include completion of a formal education or training program which includes both theory related to the first assistant role, as well as supervised clinical experience in the first assistant role.

Prior to pursuing the specialized preparation for the role of the first assistant in surgery, the Board recommends that the registered nurse have demonstrated proficiency in the roles of the scrub and circulating nurse.

A registered nurse who functions as a first assistant to a surgeon during surgical procedures, must be under the continuous, direct and on site supervision of the physician performing the surgical procedure. The registered nurse first assistant shall not be expected to replace or assume the responsibilities of the physician performing the surgical procedure.

A registered nurse who functions as a first assistant must:

- 1) Understand and be able to apply the principles of asepsis and infection control;
- 2) Be able to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation;
- 3) Be knowledgeable of the surgical anatomy and the operative techniques associated with procedures for which the Registered Nurse agrees to be the first assistant to the surgeon;
- 4) Recognize safety hazards in the operating room and be able to initiate appropriate corrective action;
- 5) Understand and be able to function as a member of the operating room team; and
- 6) Be able to demonstrate competency in the technical skills required of the first assistant to the surgeon.

In the role of the first assistant, the registered nurse may perform such functions as handling tissue, providing exposure using instruments, suturing, providing hemostasis, applying clamps, tying knots, suturing skin and subcutaneous tissue. While in the role of first assistant, the registered nurse may not concurrently serve as a scrub or circulating nurse.

The Board further recommends that the setting in which the registered nurse functions as first assistant in surgery have clear written policies and procedures regarding the utilization of registered nurses as first assistants, a process to ensure competency for the role and an annual review of performance of the registered nurse in the role as first assistant in surgery.

Adopted 1/94
Reaffirmed 2/99