

Turning the Legislative Workforce Chute Into A Ladder

July 2023



ASSOCIATION OF SURGICAL TECHNOLOGISTS

AST Government Affairs' Aim

AST seeks legal recognition for surgical technology and surgical assisting. Why? To increase the profession's stature, to create a cohesive mechanism to enter practice, to improve the legitimacy, authority, and identity of the profession, and to increase legal rights. AST Government Affairs aims to gain recognition of surgical technology and surgical assisting through legislation and regulation. AST has been most successful in surgical technology seeking state minimum education and certifications standards. In surgical assisting, AST has collaborated and led to gain licensure and defended the practice of surgical assisting.

AST- New Funding to Align with Patient Values

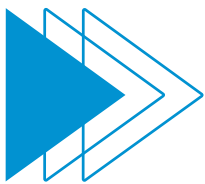
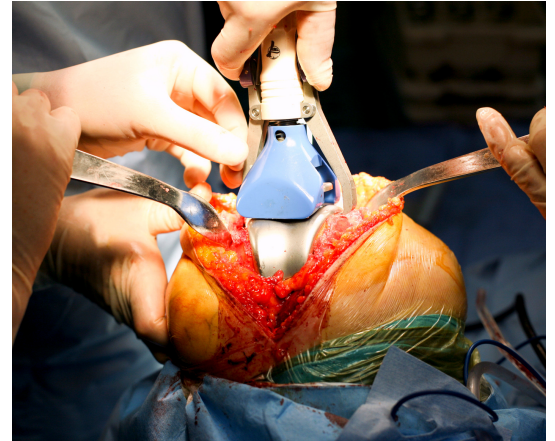
With the workforce shortages, more funding is available for surgical technology education. AST uses this opportunity to influence the profession by ensuring government funding for student loans, scholarships, workforce training programs, colleges, and apprenticeships align with AST values, including accredited education.

AST's Successes

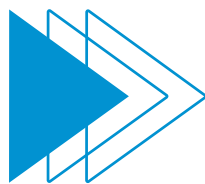
AST has passed laws for minimum education and certification for surgical technologists in Connecticut, Idaho, South Carolina, Nevada, Texas, Tennessee, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Oregon, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Virginia. AST has passed laws for registration in Colorado, Washington, Arkansas, and Illinois. AST has led and supported surgical assisting licensing and registration laws in Texas, Kentucky, Illinois, Washington, D.C., Indiana, Colorado, Tennessee, Nebraska, and Virginia. AST also achieved federal government recognition of surgical assisting as a separate profession through the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Legislation Takes Thousands of Times Longer Than Surgery

Except for a few states where AST has had luck, most of these wins require years and thousands of hours of work. It takes time to educate policymakers in each state about the professions and their role in patient safety. AST does much policy work behind the scenes answering legislators' questions, building grassroots, media, bringing legislators to our surgical technology programs, testifying at hearings, and getting support from surgical professional groups, surgeons, and anesthesiologists.

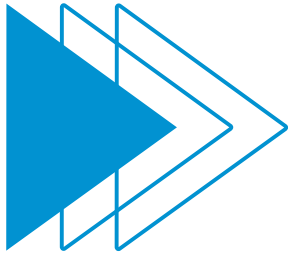


AST has had significant legislative successes this year, passing legislation, ensuring surgical technologists were not defined as nursing technicians, defending our laws, and aligning surgical technology scholarships, loans, and tuition reimbursement with AST principles.



AST has also ensured educational programs in states with clear minimum education standards in law earn accreditation. AST has worked with members to shut down on-the-job training in states with strong surgical technology education laws.





Getting legislation passed is like a game of chutes and ladders. Chutes are part of the process. Success is a big commitment.

Success takes much teamwork, resilience, and patience. Surgical technologists need to maximize their ladders and minimize their chutes. The ladders include having influential people and groups who understand the importance of Certified Surgical Technologists in patient safety, worker safety, and healthcare value.

The most prominent "chute" right now is the workforce. Legislators nationwide are worried about education as a "barrier to entry." Not a single day goes by in a legislature without the term "barrier to entry" being mentioned. Legislators now have a primary concern that competes with patient



safety: the workforce. Surgical technologists can transform this chute into a ladder by helping build the surgical technology workforce with graduates of accredited programs.

Certified Surgical Technologists want to keep graduation from an accredited program and certification as the dominant entry point for surgical technology. State assemblies can work to ensure enough graduates are available from accredited programs.

How can state assemblies help build a workforce? One way is ensuring accredited programs have full enrollment (see list below). Another

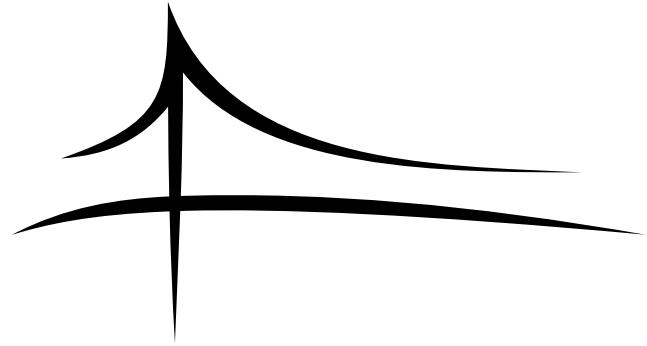
way is creating mentorship programs to help enrolled students succeed in the program and shortly after graduation. Mentorship during surgical technology programs and when surgical technologists are new to the field helps students and new surgical technologists succeed.

Ways AST State Assemblies are Increasing Enrollment in Accredited Programs:

- ➔ Asking Program Directors how state assembly leadership can best support them.
- ➔ Building a surgical technologist scholarship and loan repayment resource list on the state assembly website.
- ➔ Building an accredited surgical technologist apprenticeship resource list on the state assembly website. (AST supports apprenticeships done in collaboration with accredited programs.)
- ➔ Making flyers listing all the accredited surgical technology programs in the state with the program directors' contact information and distributing them to hospital employees, high school students, and other community events.
- ➔ Encouraging high school students to take qualifying prerequisites during high school.
- ➔ Career fairs.
- ➔ Encouraging healthcare facilities to provide scholarships to send SPD techs and other OR support staff to accredited surgical technology programs.

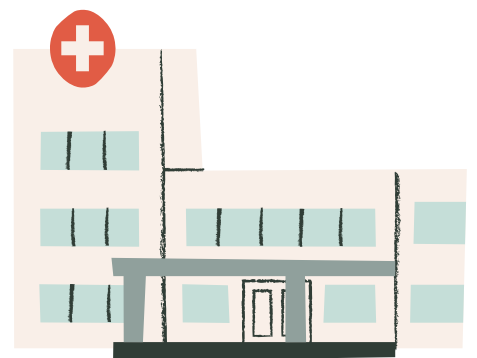
A Win-Win: Distance Education in Accredited Programs

Another key workforce component is having enough accredited programs throughout the state. Due to lower enrollment in community colleges in all fields, many accredited programs are only partially full. Yet, in many states, some areas are underserved regarding accredited surgical technology programs. Surgical technology leaders are building distance programs and reaching out to these communities to create a win-win situation in which rural students and students in underserved areas can get the education they need, and, simultaneously, accredited surgical technology programs can fill their classrooms. State assembly leadership can help bridge these communities by helping build distance programs in accredited surgical technology education programs and spreading the word about them.



When States Need New Programs

If accredited surgical technology programs in a state are full, new accredited programs are needed. The accredited programs have full enrollment in one state, and fourteen community colleges do not have surgical technology programs in that state. Surgical technology leaders are reaching out to the colleges (geographically distant from other accredited programs) to start new programs. They are also targeting programs that already have health education programs to share resources like skills labs.

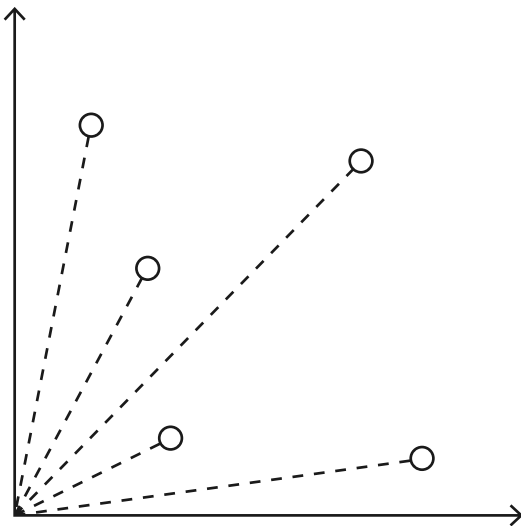


Apprenticeships in Collaboration with Accredited Programs



Apprenticeship funding is growing. Hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers can partner with accredited surgical technology programs to start apprenticeships. Federal and state funding is available for healthcare facilities to pay students for their clinical hours during the apprenticeship.

Truth to Combat Fiction: Collect Data



Collecting data is another way of turning the workforce chute into a workforce ladder. Organizations that do not want accredited education for surgical technologists exaggerate the workforce shortage. Combat fiction with truth. The truth lies in data.

AST state assemblies are starting to collect data on job openings for surgical technologists over time in a few sample cities (the most populous city in the state, the capital, and rural areas with hospitals). A link to the spreadsheet is available here: [www.ast.org/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Public_Policy/Sample Workforce Data Sheet.xlsx](http://www.ast.org/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Public_Policy/Sample_Workforce_Data_Sheet.xlsx)