



Position Statement on Unlicensed Assistive Personnel

There has been a move by nursing to define and control the practice of what nursing refers to as “unlicensed assistive personnel.” Articles in nursing journals and official statements by nursing associations have taken the position that these “unlicensed” personnel are a threat to patient care and that it is nursing’s responsibility to decide what duties these personnel may perform.

The Association of Surgical Technologists (AST) rejects any suggestion or inference that surgical technologists are nursing assistive personnel and that nursing has the right to dictate the scope of practice of the profession. Surgical technologists belong to a separate non-nursing discipline of highly skilled, credentialed allied health professionals who are completely qualified to carry out the duties for which they have been educated.

There are more than 200 educational programs for surgical technologists in the United States. Approximately 130 of these programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Educational Programs, working in conjunction with the American College of Surgeons (ACS), the American Hospital Association (AHA), and AST. In these programs, students receive in-depth educational preparation specifically focused on the operating room. More than 3,000 students graduated from accredited programs last year fully prepared to assume the duties of the profession of surgical technology.

Acting in consultation with ACS, AHA, and AMA, certification, instead of licensure, was selected by the profession as the preferred method of credentialing surgical technologists because it allows one standard to be used on a national level. Surgical technologists may become certified by passing a national certifying examination offered by the Liaison Council on Certification for the Surgical Technologist (LCC-ST), an independent certifying agency accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The national certifying exam has met NCCA’s rigorous testing and validity standards and is continually evaluated to ensure that it reflects current surgical practices. More than 40,000 individuals have been certified since the exam was first offered; in 1993, more than 3,000 individuals were certified by the LCC-ST. While not all state licensure acts have renewal requirements, surgical technologists must renew their certification every 6 years by participation in continuing education or retesting.

While some allied health professionals have supervisors in the work place who are nurses, this does not mean that they are nursing assistants or assistants to nurses. AST does not believe that because a profession is unlicensed that it should automatically fall under the purview of nursing to determine what it can and can not do. Each profession

should be evaluated on the basis of its educational standards, credentialing requirements, and record of providing quality patient care.