



# CREATING THE SURGICAL ENVIRONMENT

## ASSURING HIGHER OR QUALITY AND LOWER CARE COSTS?

### **For CSTs and CSFAs, it's a matter of principles.**

Skilled in the principles of asepsis and the practice of sterile technique, Certified Surgical Technologists (CSTs) and Certified Surgical First Assistants (CSFAs) are on the frontlines in today's optimal surgical environments. The expertise these highly-trained professionals bring to the OR contributes directly to risk reduction, cost curtailment and quality assurance. For health care administrators tasked with finding value-enhancing strategies for the surgical setting, the presence of CSTs and CSFAs is evidence-based medicine at its best.

CSTs and CSFAs are integral members of the surgical team who work closely with surgeons, anesthesiologists, registered nurses and other surgical personnel delivering patient care before, during and after surgery.

### **Certified Surgical Technologist**

The CST in the scrub role handles the instruments, supplies and equipment necessary during the surgical procedure. Certified Surgical Technologists have an understanding of the procedure being performed, anticipate the needs of the surgeon and have the necessary knowledge and ability to ensure quality patient care during the operative procedure, while monitoring and preserving the sterile field.

### **Circulating Certified Surgical Technologist**

The CST in the circulating role obtains additional instruments, supplies and equipment necessary while the surgical procedure is in progress. The circulating surgical technologist monitors conditions in the operating room and constantly assesses the needs of the patient and surgical team.

### **Certified Surgical First Assistant**

Certified Surgical Technologists who have obtained the Certified Surgical First Assistant credential may serve in the role of surgical first assistant, under the direct supervision of the surgeon. As defined by the American College of

Surgeons, the surgical first assistant provides aid in exposure, hemostasis and other technical functions that will help the surgeon carry out a safe operation with optimal results for the patient. These functions include, but are not limited to, positioning of the patient, suturing and closure of body planes and skin, and the application of wound dressings.

## **CSTS AND CSFAS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN CASE MANAGEMENT.**

The CST is responsible for three phases of surgical patient care, or surgical case management, with minimal direction or supervision from other surgical team members. Some duties of the CST in each phase of case management include:

### **Preoperative Case Management**

- ▲ Scrubbing and donning sterile gown and gloves
- ▲ Gathering necessary equipment and supplies
- ▲ Opening sterile supplies
- ▲ Donning personal protective equipment
- ▲ Organizing the sterile field for use
- ▲ Counting necessary items
- ▲ Assisting team members during entry to the sterile field
- ▲ Exposing the operative site with sterile drapes

### **Intraoperative Case Management**

- ▲ Passing instrumentation, equipment and supplies to the surgeon and surgical assistant
- ▲ Preparing and handling pharmaceuticals
- ▲ Predicting needs of the patient and surgeon and preparing necessary items
- ▲ Counting necessary items
- ▲ Caring for specimens
- ▲ Applying dressings

### **Postoperative Case Management**

- ▲ Maintaining the sterile field until the patient is transported
- ▲ Removing used instruments, equipment and supplies following use
- ▲ Preparing the OR for the next patient

The proficient CST demonstrates a caring attitude towards the patient, other surgical team members and the patient-care environment. It is also necessary to understand normal anatomy and physiology, the pathological condition affecting the patient, the planned operative procedure, and consider any variations that may be necessary to accommodate a specific patient.

A common misconception about surgical technologists is that nurses are more qualified to work in the OR because their educational program is often longer. However, during the 1970s, the operative environment was dropped from most nursing curricula. The surgical technology graduate receives more in-depth education in the specialized processes and procedures that exist in surgery. Often, nurses who enter the OR environment are trained on the job by surgical technologists.

## **CSTs AND CSFAs ARE SPECIFICALLY EDUCATED FOR THE OPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT.**

Surgical technology students receive in-depth practical knowledge and substantive clinical education related to the OR. The surgical technology educational program ranges from 10 months, to earn a diploma or certificate, to two years to obtain an associate's degree. These programs not only include intensive hours in the class-room, but also extensive clinical experience in health care facilities.

Surgical technology students study anatomy and physiology, microbiology, pharmacology, principles of asepsis, surgical techniques, patient preparation and care of surgical instruments and equipment.

Surgical technology educational programs are accredited through a formal accreditation process involving the American College of Surgeons and Association of Surgical Technologists. The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs (CAAHEP) is the professionally-recognized accrediting body for surgical technology programs. CAAHEP accredits programs representing 21 allied health

professions, recognizing more than 2,000 allied health education programs.

Graduates of accredited programs must successfully complete a certification examination in order to attain the CST credential. Certification examinations are administered by the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) and they are the only surgical technology and surgical first assisting examinations in the country accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. Contact the NBSTSA or visit their website, [www.nbstsa.org](http://www.nbstsa.org) for current eligibility requirements.

## **CSTS AND CSFAS ARE DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS.**

### **CSTs and CSFAs Have Proven Their Knowledge and Commitment to Quality Patient Care on National Examinations.**

Surgical technologists and surgical first assistants undergo rigorous certifying procedures to earn a nationally-recognized credential as a Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) or Certified Surgical First Assistant (CSFA).

Certification, instead of licensure, was selected by the profession as the preferred method of credentialing surgical technologists and surgical first assistants because it allows employers to evaluate prospective employees by one verifiable, national standard. It is the single method by which all surgical technologists and surgical first assistants demonstrate their knowledge of the principles of surgical technology. Certification not only ensures quality care for the patients, but also provides a valuable asset to the health care institution's risk-management program and is a benefit during the institutional accreditation review. In addition, many CSTs and CSFAs carry their own personal malpractice insurance, which can provide the health care facility with another financial benefit.

## **CSTs and CSFAs Actively Participate in Continuing Education to Keep Current with the Latest in Surgical Techniques, Asepsis and Surgical Patient Care.**

The certification cycle renews every four years, wherein individuals pursuing a CST credential are required to earn 60 continuing education (CE) credits to maintain certification. Individuals pursuing the CSFA credential are required to earn 75 CE credits in the four-year period. The requirement for renewal assures employers that the surgical staff is knowledgeable and actively committed to quality patient care. Employers can easily verify a prospective employee's certification status by visiting the NBSTSA website, [www.nbstsa.org](http://www.nbstsa.org), or by calling 800-637-7433.

## **CSTs and CSFAs Work Successfully in Any Area Where a High Level of Knowledge of Sterile Technique and Surgical Products is Required.**

CSTs and CSFAs can fill a number of roles in the OR, including scrub, circulator and, with additional training, surgical first assistant.

In addition to the OR, CSTs are employed in central supply and purchasing, where they assist in evaluating many surgical products to facilitate purchasing decisions.

Conversely, many CSTs and CSFAs also work as representatives for medical products companies and utilize their OR experience to help facilities knowledgeably select products to accommodate their surgical needs.

An increasing number of CSTs and CSFAs are applying their education and sharing operating room experience as educators in surgical technology programs offered by universities and community colleges.

Another career option that many CSTs and CSFAs are now pursuing successfully is the field of assisting in veterinary surgery.



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***www.ast.org***

Business Hours:  
8 am to 4:30 pm MDT  
Monday-Friday

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THE NATIONAL BOARD  
OF SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY  
AND SURGICAL ASSISTING

**The National Board of Surgical Technology**  
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