

## AST Tips on Mock Surgeries

Mock surgeries performed at state capitols are an excellent advocacy tool. Mock surgeries vividly teach legislators and other policymakers about surgical technology. The media loves mock surgeries because they are exciting and visual.



Mock surgeries require meticulous preparation and should be professional and polished. Many AST state assemblies have produced fantastic mock surgeries! Using the experience from other state assemblies, here is a list of tips and ideas to help your State Assembly plan a successful mock surgery.

### Getting Started

- 1. Get Permission.** You will need permission from proper authority at your state capitol to reserve space and perform the mock surgery. If your State Assembly has a lobbyist, then get the lobbyist's support in connecting your Assembly with the proper authority at the capitol. Find out the Capitol's event rules – most importantly regarding whether or not sharp surgical equipment may be brought into the Capitol! Get permission from Capitol security in writing **and** be sure someone in your Assembly has the permission document available to present, if requested, on the day of the surgery.
  - *Many state assemblies have received special permission to bring surgical equipment into state capitols.*

- 2. Scheduling.**

Consider the legislative schedule when choosing a date and time to present the mock surgery. Coordinate scheduling with your lobbyist, if your State Assembly has a lobbyist. **NOTE: The media prefers mornings**, as this gives them time to film and edit footage before the evening news. Schedule an hour before the mock surgery to set-up and an hour after for clean-up.

Determine where inside the Capitol the surgery will be located. Do not schedule your mock surgery when there are other competing events at the Capitol! Do not schedule your mock surgery when the state budget allocations will be announced!

- *In another state, 700 teachers were rallying against budget cuts, so legislators did not step outside to see the mock surgery because they were avoiding the teachers!*

- 3. Engage State Assembly Members.** The mock surgery team will likely include State Assembly Board members. However, the mock surgery is also a great opportunity to engage non-board members! It is important to engage actively employed surgical technologists and consider enlisting new members and recent graduates of surgical technology programs.
- 4. Assign a Mock Surgery Leader.** The State Assembly should appoint a leader for the mock surgery. The leader should create a mock surgery plan, create a timeline, and delegate duties. Many state assemblies choose to assign "captains" who are responsible for successfully completing tasks delegated by the leader. The leader should make sure every participant knows their assignment and sticks to task completion dates!

5. **Assign Captains.** Captains may include the following, and any others necessary to ensure a smooth production:

- Personnel Captain
  - i. This captain identifies necessary team members for the mock surgery AND gets commitments from the following professionals to perform the surgery:
    1. Surgeon
    2. Certified Surgical First Assistant
    3. Anesthesiologist or CRNA
    4. RN Circulator and
    5. Certified Surgical Technologist...of course!
- Media Captain
- Assembly Spokesperson
- Equipment Captain (this captain will need many assistants)
- Signage Captain (to create relevant signs/posters)
- Audience Captain (to invite legislators, legislative staff, State Assembly members and students)

6. **Creating the Surgical Team.** The surgical team should be comprised of an orthopedic surgeon (and ideally the surgeon's industry representative), Certified Surgical First Assistant (or other surgical assistant, if surgical assisting is prohibited in the state without a license), Anesthesiologist or CRNA, RN Circulator, and Certified Surgical Technologist. ***The CST should be a practicing surgical technologist (not an instructor) with current certification who performs knee replacements on a regular basis.***

AST requires that an actual surgeon perform the mock surgery. A stand-in for a surgeon may leave the impression that the medical community does not support the legislation. The surgeon is an effective advocate in favor of the legislation. Ideally, the surgeon should bring his own surgical assistant to increase the flawlessness of the performance.

The Personnel Captain should ask the surgeon to bring his/her industry representative (from a company like Stryker, Zimmer or DePuy) to the mock surgery. The surgeon's industry representative typically provides equipment such as the saw bone, saw, knee system specific trays, basic orthopedic trays, knee retractors, etc. **Everyone recruited for the surgical team should be supportive of the legislation!**

**NOTE:** Where the proposed legislation addresses Surgical Assistant licensure or certification, the surgical assistant must be appropriately certified. If the legislation includes surgical *assistant* licensure or certification — *and* the recruited surgeon generally uses a PA or RNFA — an exception should be made to the rule regarding surgeons bringing their own surgical assistant; instead, the surgeon should recruit a CSFA.

7. **Create A Timeline.** Making a timeline is easy! For example:

- Two months before surgery:
  - i. Finalize surgical team members
  - ii. Start gathering equipment
  - iii. Engage State Assembly members
- Five weeks before surgery — finalize details regarding equipment
- Four weeks before surgery — send invitations to legislators
- Three weeks before surgery — focus on media
- Two weeks before surgery — finalize preparation

Don't worry if your State Assembly doesn't have a full two months to prepare. Other states have successfully prepared in less time. However, the more prep time you have — the better!

8. **Schedule the Dress Rehearsal.** Make sure the surgeon, first assistant, surgical technologist and State Assembly mock surgery leaders attend the dress rehearsal. Find a local hospital, school or even hotel to perform the dress rehearsal. The dress rehearsal can be the day of the mock surgery **if** the mock surgery is in the afternoon, but rehearsal should be the night before if the mock surgery is scheduled for the morning.

A dress rehearsal is absolutely critical! Quick set-up and take down should be practiced, in addition to practicing the surgical procedure from beginning to end including: the timeout, introduction by the surgeon of the team members, and narration by the spokesperson. The dress rehearsal is also when each member of the surgical team should practice their 15-20 second “sound bites” for the media.

*The event must be impactful, dramatic and precisely orchestrated.* It is more like a Broadway production than a real surgery, so rehearsal is a must. The surgery should be like a ballet but also look labor intensive and fast-paced. *This is not simply a surgical demonstration — it is an advocacy tool demonstrating that the surgical technologists’ position is skilled, swift, complex and precise.* Therefore, the profession demands minimum education and certification requirements.

9. **The Big Day.** Once the surgical team arrives inside the Capitol, there is no room for mistakes or appearing unprepared. Surgical technologists must look like they know what they’re doing and why they are there. So, look important and be proactive! You only get one shot to create an effective performance. An excellent surgical performance goes a long way in gathering support for the legislation!

**NOTE:** The mock procedure itself usually lasts 45 minutes to one hour. Allow one hour for set-up, one hour for the surgery and media interviews, and one hour to take down. CSTs assisting the event should expect an **all-day commitment**, as there is miscellaneous pre- and post-surgery work to be done.

10. **Schedule the Spokesperson rehearsal with AST Government Affairs Staff.** The spokesperson has the most important job. The spokesperson must drive home the message of WHO surgical technologists are, WHY the technologist’s role is important, WHAT the legislation does, and HOW the legislation is important in preventing patient harm. AST will provide a sample script to the spokesperson.

A spokesperson rehearsal is typically conducted by phone a week or more before the surgery. The script is about ten minutes long, and the spokesperson repeats the narrative as legislators come in and out of the surgical performance. The spokesperson starts by briefly introducing the surgical team and thanking the legislative sponsors. The spokesperson then focuses on the key advocacy messages and incorporates information about the technical components of the surgery (strategically pausing when particularly riveting surgical tasks are being performed!).

Because legislators are generally unfamiliar with the surgical technologist profession, it is important (during the mock surgery) to use only the term: Surgical Technologist. Do **not** use terms such as “surgical technicians”, “OR techs”, “scrub techs” or “surg techs”. Also, the spokesperson should **not** use acronyms (e.g., say “Association of Surgical Technologists” not “AST”).

The spokesperson’s goal is to convey the complexity and importance of the surgical technologist’s job. This is accomplished by using powerful statements such as, “Surgical Technologists perform multiple tasks at break-neck speed while simultaneously predicting the next move of the surgeon — all while maintaining sterile technique for a sterile environment”. Or, “Surgeries used to require as few as 45 instruments, but now it is not uncommon for Surgical Technologists to manage more than 1,000 instruments during a single procedure!”. Or, “Surgical Technologists impact the pace of surgery, which is critically important, because every second that passes increases a patient’s potential health risks related to anesthesia, blood loss and infection.”

*The message also must focus on the importance of the legislation. AST can provide a model script.*

11. **Invite Legislators.** Send a paper invitation and email invitation in advance of the mock surgery. Have constituents contact their legislators by phone with a personal invitation a week before the mock surgery. The day before the surgery, State Assembly members should call their representative and senator *again* to invite them to the mock surgery. **An email is not enough.** Be creative! The day before the event you could write the event, time, date and location on a surgical mask (or similar object) and place the invitation in the legislator's Inbox!
12. **Work with AST Staff to Create Invitations for State Assembly Members and Students.** After the core leadership team for the mock surgery has been established, State Assembly leadership should send invitations. Before sending the invitations, State Assembly leadership and AST staff should work with the lobbyist to find out how much room there is for attendees. If the space is small, then prioritize invitations only for legislators, legislative staff and surgical technologists who planned the mock surgery. Attendees should be informed of specifics such as location and parking.
13. **Audience Involvement.** Surgical techs and student attendees should refrain from speaking loudly or cheering but are allowed to clap when appropriate. The techs are part of the audience, and the audience helps to create excitement! So, techs and students should look riveted by the surgical performance even if they've seen it before!