Question: The Tennessee legislature updated the surgical technologist law in 2013. What is the impact of the revised law?

Answer: The legislature made two primary changes to the law. The first was a technical amendment which updated the name of the organization that confers the Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) credential to reflect their name change to the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA).

The Tennessee legislature also revised the surgical technologist education and certification law to require either current CST certification from the NBSTSA or 15 hours per year of continuing education (CE) for all individuals employed as surgical technologists who are exempt from the CST certification requirement in Tennessee. Only surgical technologists employed as surgical technologists directly by the federal government are exempt from the new requirement.

Question: If a surgical technologist has current CST certification, is he or she required to earn 15 hours of continuing education annually?

Answer: Since the law aims to encourage individuals to maintain the CST, it does not require anything in addition to the CST. All a person who holds current CST certification has to do is show their certification to their employer once a year. The revised law states the submission of current CST certification by the NBSTSA shall satisfy the CE requirements. Thus, individuals with proof of current and active CST certification from the NBSTSA are not required to earn 15 hours of CE each year, but must ensure their CST certification is current and active. Employers are responsible for checking for current CST certification annually. The law aims to ensure all surgical technologists maintain current knowledge related to their profession, such as new surgical equipment and techniques.

Question: Are grandfathered individuals required to earn CE?

Answer: Under the revised law, grandfathered individuals working as surgical technologists must earn 15 hours of CE annually or earn and maintain the CST certification from the NBSTSA.

Question: Are graduates of CAAHEP-accredited programs who do not have current CST certification now required to earn CE?

Answer: Graduates of CAAHEP-accredited surgical technology programs who are employed as surgical technologists must earn and maintain CST certification or earn 15 hours of CE annually.

Question: What is the effective date of the new law?

Answer: The effective date of the continuing education requirement is July 1, 2013. It is under the purview of the employing hospital or ambulatory surgical center to interpret by which date the first 15 hours of CE must be complete, e.g., December 31, 2013 or July 1, 2014. The revised law states persons qualified to be employed as a surgical technologist "shall complete fifteen hours of continuing education or contact hours annually to remain qualified for employment and shall submit verification of having completed such continuing education or contact hours requirements to their employers."
Question: Who may health care facilities hire to practice surgical technology in Tennessee?

Answer: To practice as a surgical technologist in Tennessee, a surgical technologist must provide evidence to his or her employer of meeting one of following requirements:

1. Holds current and active national Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) certification established by the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA). Proof of current CST certification satisfies proof of meeting the annual CE requirement.

2. Has completed a program for surgical technology accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and completes 15 hours of CE annually. (Such individuals are eligible to take the CST exam to earn CST certification from the NBSTSA. These individuals may earn and maintain CST certification in lieu of completing 15 hours of CE annually.)

3. Any person who successfully completed the surgical technologists NBSTSA certifying exam and completes 15 hours of continuing education annually. (Such individuals, if not currently certified, are eligible to re-take the CST exam to earn CST certification from the NBSTSA. These individuals may earn and maintain CST certification in lieu of completing 15 hours of CE annually.)

4. Has completed an appropriate training program for surgical technologists in the U.S. Army, Navy or Air Force and completes 15 hours of continuing education annually. (Such individuals may be eligible to take the CST exam to earn CST certification from the NBSTSA. See the NBSTSA website for eligibility details. These individuals may earn and maintain CST certification in lieu of completing 15 hours of CE annually.)

5. Is directly employed by the federal government as a surgical technologist; or

6. Any person who is grandfathered (defined below) and completes 15 hours of continuing education annually or earns and maintains CST certification.

Question: Who may be grandfathered as a surgical technologist in Tennessee?

Answer:

1. A person who provides sufficient evidence that, prior to May 21, 2007, the person was at any time employed as a surgical technologist for not less than eighteen (18) months in the three (3) years preceding May 21, 2007; or

2. Any person who furnishes proof of completion of a surgical technology program that was in the process of becoming CAAHEP-accredited on July 1, 2006; or

3. Any surgical technologist who began a surgical technology program prior to May 21, 2007 and completed such training by May 21, 2010.
Question: May health care facilities require that every individual employed as a surgical technologist hold the Certified Surgical Technologist credential?

Answer: Yes. While facilities must meet the minimum standards set forth in the law, health facilities may go above and beyond the law and require that all surgical technologists hold CST certification, even if a person meets one the qualifications in the law besides certification, e.g., grandfathering. The Association of Surgical Technologist’s Recommended Standards of Practice urges that any individual employed as surgical technologist be a graduate of a CAAHEP-accredited program in surgical technology and attain the CST credential administered by the NBSTSA.

To ease compliance, most facilities in states with similar certification standards in place require CST certification from the NBSTSA for all certification-eligible surgical technologist employees and for all newly-hired surgical technologists.

Please note: The Association of Surgical Technologists provides this information on an educational basis and does not offer legal advice. AST recommends that individuals or health care facilities consult with their attorneys for answers to legal questions.