

We are Experts in the Sterile Field. Now is the Time to Promote It

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Any previous understanding of a pandemic I may have had comes in the form of a Hollywood movie circa 1990. The truth is, I never thought about it. In my reality, pandemics occurred in third-world countries with antiquated healthcare systems. The

months leading up to October have proven “interesting” as I learn to navigate a new reality.

I rely heavily on my career in the operating room and everything I know to be true regarding the spread of infections. I am astounded by the lack of knowledge regarding the transmission of COVID-19 and how that knowledge changes almost daily. This virus has made me realize — more than ever — that what I do, makes a difference. My work has always helped and educated others, but especially now, during this extraordinary time. Here is where I climb on my soapbox and preach that now is the time to promote our profession as Certified Surgical Technologists, even more so than ever.

We are the experts in our field. We are the experts in everything sterile and aseptic. Who better to educate our communities than the people who work daily to alleviate contamination and cross-contamination? We are the front-line leaders who must educate the world on the protection of oneself and others from contaminants.

This pandemic has spawned a new breed of “experts.” These experts are preaching about the use of masks, gloves, and eye protection for everyone’s health. The problem is that these experts have no education in the field of microbiology, basic prevention of virus transmission, nor how cross-contamination occurs. One thing surgical technologists know is aseptic technique and sterility in relation to virus transmission. Our country’s 100,000-plus¹ surgical

technologists are the true experts on best sterile practices.

We understand the importance of PPEs, probably more than many in healthcare. Unlike other healthcare providers, we wear them ALL THE TIME. Surgical technologists know — for example — that as the first line of defense in the fight against bacterial transmission, PPEs must be worn, removed, and disposed of properly. A mistake in any of these steps can negate their use.

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Like me, I am sure you cringe when you see people on television, social media, or out in public wearing masks below their nostrils, or not at all. People are improperly or failing to dispose of single-use masks. And don’t even get me started on gloves. People are wearing a single pair of gloves in the car, to the store, through the checkout, to the bank, etc., etc., all while touching their face, mouth, eyes, and nose!

The importance of eye protection is rarely addressed in the media. The fact that the eyes are the vascular transmitter of airborne pathogens and bloodborne pathogens must be explained to non-healthcare providers. The awareness that cough particles can be sprayed throughout the environment and into eyes should be widely discussed.

We owe it to our profession to educate the country — and the world — of our expertise. No surgical technologist should ever be referred to as, “just a tech.” We need to work together to show the world that we are so much more, especially now, when our expertise is so badly needed.

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Surgical Technologists. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/surgical-technologists.htm>