



The Workforce Shortage:
A Message from AST President
Kevin Craycraft, CST, FAST



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We've all become more aware of and are experiencing the effects of the healthcare workforce shortage. While it's literally affecting all healthcare professions, we know that it's acutely impacting our profession and all the other surgical professions.

The shortage of CSTs involves many separate but related issues, including the decrease in the number of accredited surgical technology programs resulting in the decrease of new CSTs entering the workforce, leading to an increase in non-accredited programs, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

Several years ago, there were over 500 surgical technology programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and the Accreditation Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES). Today, there are 396 programs accredited by CAAHEP and 39 by ABHES totaling 435.

Not surprisingly, the decrease in the number of programs has resulted in fewer graduates taking the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTA) Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) certifying examination. This has resulted in hundreds of fewer new CSTs entering the workforce each year.

It's important to note that the decrease in the number of accredited programs has not been the result of any actions taken by CAAHEP or the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (ARC/STSA). The closures of a large number of colleges and programs has been the result of numerous allegations related to the business practices of many for-profit colleges by the US Department of Education as well as other state and federal agencies.

But as a result, and because of high demand for surgical technologists, AST been very concerned about the increased number of nonaccredited programs, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training which are counter to our goals and to the 50-year evolution of the profession.

- The cornerstone of AST's advocacy efforts are the requirements that all surgical technologists must be graduates of nationally accredited surgical technology programs and certified as a CST by the NBSTSA.
- AST opposes the development of non-accredited programs that are not otherwise in the process of seeking accreditation, particularly online programs that would probably not qualify to become accredited.
- AST opposes on-the-job training – the relic of a bygone era proven long ago not to provide adequate education to surgical technologists and protection of surgical patients.

- AST opposes apprenticeships that do not meet the educational requirements to become a professional surgical technologist. Apprenticeships that would be designed to meet accreditation standards or that partner with an established accredited program would be a great workforce solution. However, the models being pushed by the proponents of apprenticeships may only be slightly better than on-the-job training.
- AST also opposes alternative credentials whose exams have not been developed collaboratively with our profession but instead provide certification pathways for those from non-accredited programs, unaccredited apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

Promoting our education, accreditation, and certification values while at the same time combatting those that we oppose requires that we work together as a national organization along with grassroots local efforts. To that end, over a longer period of years AST has developed important relationships in the surgical community and tools that can be used to effectively advocate for the profession. Here are some of those important relationships, statements, and tools that are available to you to join the fight:

- American College of Surgeons: Statement on Surgical Technology Training and Certification – ACS has been a sponsoring organization of the ARC/STSA and the NBSTSA for over 50 years and has developed this statement that supports the education surgical technologists, the accreditation of all surgical technology programs, and the certification of all graduates.
- You'll note that the ACS Statement has also been approved by members organizations of the Council on Surgical and Perioperative Safety (CSPS); American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA); American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA); American Association of Surgical Physician Assistants (AASPA); and American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN).
- AST's Position Statement on Accreditation Process, Certification, Official Title of Profession, and On-the-Job Training – Recently approved by the AST Board of Directors, reaffirming our long-standing values and positions.
- AST Encourages Healthcare Facility Leaders to Support Local, Accredited Surgical Technology Educational Programs
- Can Hospitals & ASCs Require CST Certification in States without Regulation? Yes.
- Advocating for Accredited Surgical Technology Education Before Policymakers
- Recommendations for CSTs, Program Directors, and State Assemblies When Addressing On-the-Job Training with Healthcare Facility Administration
- Message to Surgical Technology Program Directors Regarding Alternative Certification Credentials from AST, ARC/STSA, and NBSTSA – A joint letter from AST, ARC/STSA, and NBSTSA regarding alternative credentials that has been previously sent (and will be again in the future) to all surgical technology programs directors.

The profession has a lot to be optimistic about. As of today, AST enjoys the tremendous support of more than 55,000 members – the most in the history of the organization including many talented professionals who we're confident will work with us to carry forward these efforts.

Sincerely,
Kevin Craycraft, CST, FAST
AST President