

Surgical Technologist

Surgical technologists are an integral part of the team of medical practitioners providing surgical care to patients in a variety of settings.



Career Description

Surgical technologists prepare the operating room by selecting and opening sterile supplies. Preoperative duties also include assembling, adjusting, and checking nonsterile equipment to ensure that it is in proper working order. Common duties include operating sterilizers, lights, suction machines, electrosurgical units, and diagnostic equipment.

When patients arrive in the surgical suite, surgical technologists assist in preparing them for surgery by providing physical and emotional support, checking charts, and observing vital signs. They have been educated to properly position the patient on the operating table, assist in connecting and applying surgical equipment and/or monitoring devices, and prepare the incision site. Surgical technologists have primary responsibility for maintaining the sterile field, being constantly vigilant that all members of the team adhere to aseptic technique.

They most often function as the sterile member of the surgical team who passes instruments, sutures, and sponges during surgery. After "scrubbing," they don sterile gown and gloves and prepare the sterile setup for the appropriate procedure. After other members of the sterile team have scrubbed, they assist them with gowning and gloving and with the application of sterile drapes that isolate the operative site.

In order that surgery may proceed smoothly, surgical technologists anticipate the needs of surgeons, passing instruments and providing sterile items in an efficient manner. They share with the circulator the responsibility of accounting for sponges, needles, and instruments before, during, and after surgery.

Surgical technologists may hold retractors or instruments, sponge or suction the operative site, or cut suture materials as directed by the surgeon. They connect drains and tubing and receive and prepare specimens for subsequent pathologic analysis. They are responsible for preparing and applying sterile dressings following the procedure and may assist in the application of nonsterile dressings, including plaster or synthetic casting materials. After surgery, they prepare the operating room for the next patient.

Surgical technologists are most often members of the sterile team but may function in the nonsterile role of circulator. The circulator is not gowned and gloved during the surgical procedure but is available to respond to the needs of the anesthesia provider, keep a written account of the surgical procedure, and participate jointly with the scrubbed person in counting sponges, needles, and instruments before, during, and after surgery. In operating rooms where local anesthetics are administered, they meet the needs of the conscious patient.

Certified surgical technologists with additional specialized education or training also may act in the role of the surgical first assistant. The surgical first assistant provides aid in exposure, hemostasis, and other technical functions under the surgeon's direction that will help the surgeon carry out a safe operation with optimal results for the patient.

Surgical technologists also may provide staffing in postoperative recovery rooms where patients' responses are carefully monitored in the critical phases following general anesthesia.



Employment Characteristics

A majority of surgical technologists work in hospitals, principally in the surgical suite and also in emergency rooms and other settings that call for knowledge of, and ability in, maintaining asepsis, such as materials management and central service. A number work in a wide variety of settings and arrangements, including outpatient surgicenters, private employment by physicians, or as self-employed technologists.

Those who work in hospital and other institutional settings are usually expected to work rotating shifts or to accommodate on-call assignments to ensure adequate staffing for emergency surgical procedures during evening, night, weekend, and holiday hours. Otherwise, surgical technologists follow a standard hospital workday.



Salary

Salaries vary depending on the experience and education of the individual, the economy of a given region, the responsibilities of the position, and the working hours. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual salary for surgical technologists was \$34,010 in 2004. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Employment Outlook

According to a recent study conducted by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the forecast for employment opportunities for surgical technologists is one of rapid growth. Demand for technologists varies among communities and geographic regions. Prospective students are advised to assess the market for graduates within the region in which they would like to work before matriculating in an educational program. Such information is likely to be available through local employment offices, local accredited programs, and hospital councils or hospitals.



Educational Programs

Length. Programs range from 12 to 24 months.

Prerequisites. High school diploma or equivalent.

Curriculum. Accreditation standards require didactic instruction and supervised clinical practice. Subject areas include:

- Medical terminology, professional ethics, and legal aspects of surgical patient care
- Anatomy and physiology, microbiology, anesthesia, and pharmacology
- Sterilization methods and aseptic technique
- Instruments, supplies, and equipment used in surgery
- Surgical patient care and safety precautions
- Operative procedures and biomedical sciences
- Supervised clinical practice in the operating room must include commonly performed procedures in general surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, ophthalmology, otorhinolaryngology, plastic surgery, urology, orthopedics, neurosurgery, thoracic surgery, and cardiovascular and peripheral vascular surgery.



Inquiries

Careers/Curriculum

Association of Surgical Technologists
6 West Dry Creek Circle, Suite 200
Littleton, CO 80120
800 637-7433 or 303 694-9130
303 694-9169 Fax
www.ast.org

Certification/Registration

Inquiries regarding certification as a certified surgical technologist (CST) or a CST certified first assistant (CST/CFA) may be addressed to:

National Board for Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting
(formerly Liaison Council on Certification for the Surgical
Technologist)

6 West Dry Creek Circle, Suite 100
Littleton, CO 80120
800 707-0057
303 325-2536 Fax
www.nbsta.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
(CAAHEP) in collaboration with:

Accreditation Review Committee on Education in Surgical
Technology

6 West Dry Creek Circle, Suite 110
Littleton, CO 80120
303 694-9262
303 741-3655 Fax
E-mail: cindy.collinsworth@arcst.org.