May 15, 2015

Members of the Surgical First Assistant Technical Review Committee:

During the last two meetings of the Technical Review Committee (TRC) for the credentialing review of surgical first assistants, the dialogue has centered on the potential need for licensure of not only surgical first assistants as proposed but also surgical technologists. Early in the first meeting, statements from public attendees characterized the functions of surgical technologists who work in Nebraska as warranting licensure. At the close of the second meeting, the TRC recommended to the applicant panel consideration of an application amendment including licensure of surgical technologists. The TRC also requested resource material consisting of scopes of practices of individuals present in the surgical suite during a procedure, definitions and information pertinent to the credentialing review process and letters of support for the application from organizations stating their positions.

The original stakeholder group which evaluated the need for licensure of surgical first assistants and completed the research necessary for the credentialing review application met on Thursday, April 30, 2015, to discuss the TRC recommendation for amending the application. The stakeholder group consists of representatives for multiple nurse organizations, independent ambulatory centers, surgical first assistants, surgical technologists, physician assistants, hospitals and surgical centers. The group was provided with an update on the credentialing review process and asked to determine how the applicant panel should move forward.

The options discussed were 1) amending the application to include licensure of surgical technologists, 2) maintaining the current application with amendments addressing scope of practice and registry components, or 3) maintaining the current application with amendments addressing scope of practice and registry components and pursuing submission of a separate application for licensure of surgical technologists. All but one group represented at the meeting, surgical technologists, firmly expressed the need to maintain the original intent of the application, which is to obtain licensure of surgical first assistants and develop a mandatory registry for surgical technologists. Reasons given by various supporters of option #2 were many, the primary of which are:

- The emergent issue is the inability of surgical first assistants to function as trained, which needs to be addressed as quickly as possible,
- Amending the application will overwhelm the credentialing review process, especially when it comes to educating members of the legislature on the intricacies of health care occupations,
- Increasing access to necessary patient care should promote cost-effective employment of qualified individuals to assist surgeons, enabling them to provide a higher quality of care while lessening the risk of surgical procedures,
- Patient safety is the ultimate priority of the stakeholder group, and
- Nothing precludes the surgical technologists from submitting a separate application for licensure of surgical technologists.

The consensus was unanimous that surgical first assistants need licensure in the state and that a registry for surgical technologists would provide a foundation for future efforts to strengthen the field of surgical technology.

Sidney Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and the NHA appreciate and respect everyone's perspective on this matter. Based on the decision of the stakeholder group, it has been and remains the intent of the applicant group to continue its pursuit to:

- license surgical first assistants, and
- create a mandatory registry for surgical technologists.

The emergent issue addressed in the application is the inability of surgical first assistants to function as trained. That is and will continue to be the primary concern of SRMC and the NHA.

Our number one goal is patient safety. Surgical first assistants are trained to function as the primary provider of assistance to the surgeon during a surgical procedure and possess training specific to the intricacies involved in the surgical first assisting position. We want to ensure that individuals providing this service meet a standard of education and training that the State of Nebraska determines is appropriate for this role.

Tertiary to ensuring the surgical first assistant can function properly in the Nebraska is increasing access to services across the state. With licensure of surgical first assistants, surgeons will have greater access to the assistance necessary for providing services to patients in need. Currently, surgeons must rely on mid-level practitioners to assist in surgery in Nebraska. A licensed surgical first assistant can increase the availability of appropriate surgical staff.

Lastly, licensure of surgical first assistants will boost workforce development. If licensed practitioners are able to function as trained in Nebraska, more individuals will seek out the training necessary to fulfill licensure requirements. Those functioning as a surgical technologist will realize the benefits of attaining increased education. Increased demand will create new training programs in Nebraska, which will boost the workforce for this occupation.

SRMC and the NHA respect the recommendation of the TRC to amend the current application to include licensure of surgical technologists. It is important that the regulation of each occupation is pursued appropriately in a manner that allows clear delineation of each role's functions and the training and experiential requirements that accompany them. The applicant panel is committed to providing the TRC with the information and resources necessary to illustrate the need for licensure of surgical first assistants and the importance of beginning the regulatory process for surgical technologists in the manner proposed.

Respectfully,

Sidney Regional Medical Center
The Nebraska Hospital Association