

Surgical First Assistant Credentialing Review

THE FOUR CRITERIA

To aid in the Technical Review Committee's review of the surgical first assistant credentialing proposal, Sidney Regional Medical Center and the Nebraska Hospital Association have applied proposal components to each of the four criteria on which the review is based.

Criterion one: Unregulated practice can clearly harm or endanger the health, safety, or welfare of the public.

Licensure of Surgical First Assistants:

1. The role of the surgical first assistant is specific to surgical techniques and procedures that require high level training and competency to meet the safety needs of patients.
2. Surgical first assistants must possess education/training, examination and experience to function in and foster a safe surgical environment.
3. The continuing education requirements that will be in place as part of regulation will further ensure safety of the patient.

Registry for Surgical Technologists:

4. Currently, health care facilities can employ surgical technologists with little or no experience in surgical technology. Creation of a mandatory registry for surgical technologists that is a requirement for employment within Nebraska will aid the state in regulating the surgical technology field, strengthening patient safety and safeguarding against employment of inexperienced allied health professionals.
5. Requiring a competency assessment for surgical technologists as part of a mandatory registry ensures that:
 - a. Only surgical technologists with prior experience, whether on-the-job training or formal education, can be employed in Nebraska.
 - b. Surgical technologists must exhibit basic principles of surgical technology as part of the registry application process to be eligible for the registry.

Criterion two: Regulation of the profession does not impose significant new economic hardship on the public, significantly diminish the supply of qualified practitioners, or otherwise create barriers to service that are not consistent with the public welfare and interest.

Licensure of Surgical First Assistants:

1. Licensure of surgical first assistants will not impose a significant economic hardship on the public as:
 - a. Licensure fees will offset the expense to the state to implement and maintain licensure of the occupation, and

- b. The credentialing requirement will not increase the cost of the services a surgical first assistant provides to a patient as those fees are included under global billing for surgical procedures.
2. Currently, surgical first assistants cannot function in Nebraska within the role of surgical assisting. Regulation of surgical first assistants will not diminish the supply of qualified practitioners but rather allow those who meet the licensure requirements to practice in Nebraska. The ability to practice will logically encourage other allied health professionals in Nebraska to obtain education and training required for licensure, which will in turn encourage development of training programs in the state.
3. Appropriate utilization of surgical first assistants helps increase access to care locally while controlling the cost of health care. Engaging surgical first assistants in surgical procedures is more cost-effective than utilizing mid-level practitioners to carry out the role of assistant to the surgeon, reducing the cost of service while maintaining patient safety through specialized care.

Registry for Surgical Technologists:

4. Implementation of a mandatory registry for surgical technologists will not impose a significant economic hardship on the public. Registry fees will offset the expense to the state to implement and maintain the registry.

Criterion three: The public needs assurance from the state of initial and continuing professional ability.

Licensure of Surgical First Assistants:

1. Under this proposal, only those surgical assistants who have met the new licensure standard of appropriate education, training and examination are eligible for licensure. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services will develop and approve these initial requirements. The surgical first assistant occupation has its own specific educational standards as well as private certification requirements. Under this proposal, the Department would collaborate with the private certifying bodies issuing certification for surgical first assistants to facilitate the State of Nebraska's endorsement of the education, training and testing upon which the private credential is based. These standards would become part of the new licensure standard for surgical first assistants in Nebraska.
2. Additionally, the proposal requires a continuing education component in line with national standards to aid in ensuring continuing competence. As with other occupations in the state, this component will be mandatory and rigorous to bolster patient safety.

Registry for Surgical Technologists:

3. The mandatory registry for surgical technologists will include a competency assessment requirement that will require applicants and those renewing their registration to exhibit basic principles of surgical technology. This is an indicator of both initial and continued ability providing public assurance of the applicant's competency.

Criterion four: The public cannot be protected by a more effective alternative.

Licensure of Surgical First Assistants:

1. Surgical first assistants are trained to perform very specific functions during surgical procedures “to participate in and actively assist the surgeon in completing the operation safely and expeditiously...” (The American College of Surgeons). As surgical first assistants are trained in both surgical technology and surgical assisting, they are the most qualified individual to assist the surgeon in this very specialized field. While mid-level practitioners can carry out the functions of a surgical first assistant, surgical first assistants receive more focused training as this is their specialty area, garnering more expertise and experience in assisting the surgeon.

Registry for Surgical Technologists:

2. Competency assessments as requirements for registry eligibility are an established best practice for protecting the public’s interests.

