

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Surgical Assistants</b>	<b>Ref. No.</b>	<b>FES-PST-028</b>
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## BACKGROUND

The performance of major surgical procedures requires a high level of cooperation from all members of the surgical team, including the surgeon, the assistant(s), the scrub nurse, the anesthetist and any other person involved. The more complex or lengthy the procedure the more important it is for the assistant to be fully conversant with the objectives and techniques of the operation, and for all personnel to adopt a collaborative approach.

## REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS OF SURGICAL ASSISTANTS

### General

1. The primary role of a surgical assistant is to facilitate the safe and efficient performance of an operation by the surgeon.
2. The extent to which an assistant participates in the performance of any procedure is determined by the operating surgeon.
3. Assistants should have a clear understanding of the purpose, nature and specific technical requirements of the operation.
4. An assistant should have a good knowledge of the anatomy of the operative region and an understanding of the anticipated pathology.
5. An assistant must understand and at all times observe the required aseptic techniques.
6. An assistant must have a thorough understanding of general operating theatre behavior and any specific requirements relevant to the theatre suite in use.
7. Assistants must be conversant with the commonly used surgical instruments and the skills required for their use. These instruments will vary significantly according to the surgical specialty and the site and purpose of the operation.
8. A surgical assistant must appreciate the importance of avoiding 'sharps' injuries and understand the techniques which the surgical team adopts for this purpose.
9. Assistants must be appropriately trained and maintain their continuing professional development as defined by their scope of practice.

### SPECIFIC

The primary role of a surgical assistant includes:

1. **To act as facilitator**, making easier the work of the surgeon before, during and at the completion of the operation. It will be necessary for the surgical assistant to provide adequate exposure, maintain a clear operative field of view, support and protect body tissues and to assist in achieving the objective of the operation.
2. **To act as facilitator and a co-worker**, working closely with the primary surgeon. Special additional operative skills and experience will be required as the assistant must know exactly the steps and processes of the operation planned and be able to assist the surgeon with this.

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The surgeon and the assistant need to work very closely together, however the surgeon always maintains primary responsibility and direction.

3. **To act as facilitator and a consultant** during the course of the operation. Such input requires considerable knowledge and experience with the pathology, the operative procedure and the techniques involved. In this situation, it is important for the surgeon to be able to share thoughts, discuss problems, seek opinions from a surgeon experienced with the procedure, and sometimes to take advice.

#### THE CHOICE OF AN ASSISTANT

1. The decision as to whether an assistant will be needed and the level of knowledge and skill required of the assistant is the responsibility of the operating surgeon. This decision should be made in advance so that the appropriate arrangements can be made and so that the assistant has time to prepare for the operation.
2. The assistant must be:
  - Covered by appropriate medical indemnity insurance
  - Registered and credentialed in accordance with the specifications of their role
  - Satisfy local hospital credentialing requirements

**Approver:** Director, Fellowship and Standards  
**Authoriser:** Professional Development and Standards Board