

LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF NURSING

GUIDELINES FOR REGISTERED NURSE SURGICAL FIRST ASSISTANTS

The safety and welfare of the patient should be given primary consideration in the selection of a first assistant in surgery. Therefore, ideally, the first assistant to the surgeon should be a qualified physician. However, in those situations when a qualified physician is not available to assist, a registered nurse who has received specialized preparation may function in the role of a surgical first assistant.

Under the direct supervision of the operating surgeon, the registered nurse first assistant may perform the following functions as defined.

1. Provide exposure/handle tissue: retracting for physician's visibility.
2. Cauterize bleeders: applying electrode (current) to the instrument which the physician is holding in place.
3. Tie suture knots: tying knots in sutures after the physician has put them in place.

The registered nurse first assistant must perform only first assistant functions as outlined above and must not concurrently serve as a scrub or instrument "nurse."

The responsibility of functioning as a first assistant must be based on documented knowledge and skills. First assistant functions should be performed only after the responsibility has been granted by a credentialing committee established by the hospital. The Board recommends that nursing representation be included on the committee when privileges for nurses are under consideration.

Written policies and procedures should be available in hospitals utilizing registered nurse first assistants. An orientation to the operating room should be provided to first assistants who are not employees of the hospitals. The performance of registered nurse first assistants should be reviewed at least annually by the credentialing committee.

Adopted 5/31/85

*page 85.04  
(amended by page 87.12)*