Guiding Principles for the   
Surgical Services Director Role\*

**Call to Action**

**We call on all health care facilities to ensure that the role of Director of Surgical Services is held by a perioperative nurse with advanced knowledge and leadership skills, which will optimize patient outcomes; increase staff, patient, and family satisfaction; and improve financial viability for facilities.**

**Background**

Nurses are essential to the safe delivery of perioperative and procedural care and play a vital role in the perioperative leadership team. Therefore, AORN believes that the Director of Surgical Services should be a registered nurse with perioperative experience who demonstrates exemplary leadership skills, is dedicated to upholding the values and principles of nursing practice, and advocates for implementation of those values in the care of the surgical patient.

The role of the Director is multi-faceted, requiring clinical experience, knowledge of the art and science of nursing, expertise that supports broad-level thinking, and an understanding of the fiduciary responsibilities of providing safe, quality patient care in the surgical arena. Responsibilities include collaborating and coordinating with members of the surgical or procedural team to allocate resources to promote safe, efficient, effective, and compassionate perioperative nursing care based on the AORN *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice*1 and *Perioperative Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice.*2

The Director is responsible for the design, administration, and evaluation of professional nursing services within the perioperative arena in accordance with the framework established by the state nurse practice act, the perioperative scope of practice, and the standards of care in the organization in which they work.

**Principles**

AORN provides the following principles as essential to the role of Director of Surgical Services.

1. **The Director of Surgical Services must hold and maintain an active registered nurse license.**

*Accrediting bodies and state licensure regulations require that a registered nurse be responsible and accountable for care of patients.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services should have clinical perioperative experience and expert skills and knowledge in the practice of perioperative nursing.**

*The Director of Surgical Services is responsible and accountable for the clinical, technical, and ethical care of the surgical patient.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services should be certified in perioperative nursing.**

*Certification from accredited credential providers is one important step to assure patients, colleagues, and the public at large that they are receiving the highest quality perioperative nursing care.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for providing continuous learning and professional development for the nursing team.**

*The operating room is a highly technological environment that presents many risks to patient and staff safety and well-being. Continuous learning reduces risk and fosters a culture of clinical excellence, innovation, transformation, and engagement.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for the strategic, operational, financial, and human resource management of Perioperative Services to ensure cost-effective care.**

*Management of these resources reduces the risk of harm to patients and staff, prevents errors, and promotes safe operative practices.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for integrating principles of social justice into perioperative care and health policy.**

*Disparities in health care are associated with poor surgical outcomes.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for creating a healthy work environment that ensures perioperative team members’ psychological and physical safety.**

*A positive practice environment reduces risk, encourages safe patient care practices, promotes optimal patient outcomes, and creates a desirable workplace.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for implementing and sustaining evidence-based clinical practice based on the AORN Guidelines1 and *Perioperative Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice****.***2**

*Implementation of evidence-based clinical practice will help ensure every patient achieves optimal outcomes during the perioperative experience.*

1. **The Director of Surgical Services is responsible for incorporating *AORN’s Perioperative Explications for the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements.*3**

*The Perioperative Explications serve as a guide in the ethical analysis and decisions*

*impacting perioperative care and services.*

\*Includes Director, Manager, Vice President, Assistant Vice President of Surgical Perioperative Services

References

1. *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice.* Denver, CO: AORN, Inc; 2023.
2. Benze C, Spruce L, Groah L. *Perioperative Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice.* Denver, CO: AORN, Inc; 2021. <https://www.aorn.org/guidelines-resources/clinical-resources/standards-of-practice>
3. *AORN’s Perioperative Explications for the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements.* Denver, CO: AORN, Inc; 2017.

**Resources**

*AORN Position Statement on a Healthy Perioperative Practice Environment.* AORN, Inc. 2021. <https://aorn.org/guidelines-resources/clinical-resources/position-statements>

*AORN Position Statement on Health Care Equity and Racial Justice.* AORN, Inc. 2022.   
<https://aorn.org/guidelines-resources/clinical-resources/position-statements>

*Nursing Administration: Scope and Standards of Practice.* 2nd ed. Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association, 2016.

*Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice.* 4th ed. Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association; 2021.