

ARC/STSA Accreditation Review Council On Education In Surgical Technology And Surgical Assisting

Addressing the Surgical Technologist Workforce Shortage

**Together we can make a difference! A Community Partner Resource** 





## Update from Executive Director on Workforce Efforts and Cooperation Nationwide

By Ron Kruzel, MA, CAE, CST, FAST

Published March 31, 2023

Many thanks to you—all our ARC/STSA educators—who work day in and day out to provide a quality education to your students, develop strong relationships with your partners, including local healthcare centers, and elevate the professions in your communities, states, and across the nation. You make a difference!

We want you to know our work to support you, your programs and the professions continues. ARC/STSA is working nationwide to assist our accredited educational programs and their hospital and ambulatory surgery center partners in establishing innovative ways to address the surgical technologist workforce shortage. Cooperation to accelerate education while maintaining the minimum educational requirements offered in accredited educational programs is the solution to the current workforce challenge.

Over the past few months, I have had the pleasure of being invited to speak at several state assembly meetings to share the importance of accredited educational programs. It has given me the opportunity to speak with many groups of educators about the challenges that you face and the innovative solutions you have implemented. I am inspired by your dedication and creativity.

Additionally, I had the honor this week of joining colleagues to provide testimony to the Oregon State Legislature House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care in *opposition* to Oregon House Bill 3956, which modifies House Bill 4106 by removing the requirement that surgical technology apprenticeship programs in Oregon must include a nationally accredited educational program. You can read the full testimony on our website <u>ST Workforce Shortage Resource page</u>.

The complexities of care for the surgical patient demand no less than the current curriculum requirements for a fully accredited educational program in surgical technology. There are many solutions to the ST Workforce shortage, including apprenticeship models, being developed across the country that fully address the immediacy of the shortage while maintaining the current accredited education process that has been 50 years in the making. Nationally, healthcare and hospital organizations are partnering with CAAHEP-accredited education programs in surgical technology to solve this concern. ARC/STSA is facilitating many of these discussions and providing support for innovation that maintains educational standards.

The ARC/STSA is committed to continued outreach, communication, and cooperation. If you have interesting solutions going on in your community, please reach out to me directly at <u>ron.kruzel@arcstsa.org</u>. Together we can make a difference!

#### Hospital Recruitment: Surgical Technologist Residency Program

By Rob Blackston, M.Ed., CST, CSFA, FAST

#### Published March 31, 2023

The surgical technologist staffing shortage is a serious issue that can have a significant impact on patient care and safety. It is essential to address this shortage by increasing the availability of, and access to, education programs that attract and retain more individuals in this field.

A few months ago, a local community not-for profit healthcare system enlisted my support to address staffing challenges. Initially, the hospital administrators had envisioned a "grow your own," on-the-job trained (OJT) "surgical technician" program to potentially "solve their staffing issues". With the workforce shortage of surgical technologists, among other healthcare professionals, hospitals and surgery departments across the country are faced with the cascading effects of low staffing, such as closed rooms, a reduction in surgeries, a decrease in monetary inflow, and practitioner burnout. These pressures can become perpetuating issues that can lead to a lower standard of care, due to cutbacks of essential resources.

As a steadfast advocate of standardized, quality education for our profession, I sought to explore alternatives incorporating nationally recognized standards of surgical technology education to present to hospital administrators. From this research and exploration, the win-win concept of a Surgical Technology Residency Program was born.

#### Surgical Technology Residency Program

The residency program is a collaboration between healthcare organizations and education institutions to develop a comprehensive approach that can meet the demands of the industry while providing safe and effective patient care. It provides the hospital with well-educated (CST-eligible) surgical technologists, financial support for the participating students, AND saves the hospital more than **\$100,000** over training those same students on the job.

The hospital's original plan was to train two cohorts of six students on-the-job as surgical technicians, per year. It would pay the OJT students a fulltime "student wage" to attend the hospital program and then hire them into a fulltime ST role (Washington does not require certification). As an alternative solution, I designed the ST Residency Program and proposed that we form two cohorts comprised of students from the region's accredited surgical technology programs.

To secure approval for the program and enlist the support of hospital administrators who may not fully understand the complexity and critical nature of our role in the operating room, it was important to articulate the program's monetary benefit as well. Providing rough calculations to compare the costs of two options seemed to speak volumes. Let's take a look at the numbers.

Cost Breakdown Based on Region and Facility	
On-the-Job Training (Technician Course)	Surgical Technologist Residency Program
16 weeks didactic/lab and 16 weeks clinical rotations (approximately 1,280 training hours)	Accredited program students – approximately 6 months of clinical rotations, varying days
2 cohorts/6 each = 12 new employees	2 cohorts of 6 students = 12 new CST* employees
\$20/hour plus benefits - 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE -40 hours/week)	\$20/hour during their normally scheduled clinical days (20-30 hours/week)
\$20 x 40 hours = \$800/week x 32 weeks = \$25,600 per student (16 weeks of paid, non-clinical time in class/lab)	\$20 x 20–30hrs. = \$400 - \$600/week x 26 weeks = \$10,400–\$15,600 per student
Total Cost for Facility	
\$307,200	\$124,800–\$187,200
per year for 12 OJT technicians	per year for 12 CSTs*
* Graduates of accredited surgical technology programs are eligible to sit for the CST examination.	

#### Surgical Technologist Residency Program Description

The hospital will accept six ST Residents twice a year. These positions are advertised by the hospital and open to ALL students who:

1. Are currently enrolled in a CAAHEP- or ABHES-accredited Surgical Technology program.

2. Have successfully completed and documented basic lab skills checkoffs and qualify for clinical rotations, based upon individual program requirements and Program Director approval.

3. Are documented in good standing with their program (no disciplinary action in progress or failing grades).

ST Residency Program applicants will be interviewed by a panel of hospital staff and selected utilizing a residency program interview rubric. Resident students will adhere to their individual program requirements and oversight by program faculty will still be required. For example, if a program requires more than the minimum curricular case count, then that is what the student will work to complete.

Resident students will progress through clinical cases and specialties in a logical progression that builds on their progressive mastery of skills, as the surgery schedule allows, and will have frequent evaluations by both staff preceptors and program faculty (as noted in their individual programs).

To provide support and consistency, the hospital will institute a ST preceptor development program. This program will serve to identify quality preceptors, develop their skills, and give the preceptors the tools to ensure an optimal student/preceptor experience.

#### Summary

Addressing the surgical technologist staffing shortage requires collaboration between healthcare organizations and education institutions to develop a comprehensive approach that can meet the demands of the industry while providing safe and effective patient care. The Surgical Technologist Residency Program capitalizes on paid student internships to help address the workforce shortage, and benefit the student, healthcare facility, community, and surgical patient.

**Call to Action:** Continue to educate the public and inspire your local CSTs to get out there and recruit for your programs. Encourage the leaders of our profession to be forward facing to the public and invest time into advertising our profession. Get the word out! If the average person doesn't know about the profession, how can we grow? How can we expect them to understand the importance of our role, so they don't think that they can just do a quick OJT course? Aeger primo!

#### "Better is possible. It does not take genius. It takes diligence. It takes moral clarity. It takes ingenuity. And above all, it takes a willingness to try." — Atul Gawande, Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance

**Editor's note:** The CAAHEP Standards and the ARC/STSA **do allow** for paid student clinical activities provided that the experience is educational in nature, students are not substituted for staff, and the health and safety of the students, patients, faculty and other participants associated with the educational activities of the students are adequately safeguarded.

**Rob Blackston, M.Ed., CST, CSFA, FAST,** is the Supervisor of Clinical Education – Surgical Technology at Providence – Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, WA. With more than 18 years as a practicing CST and CSFA, Blackston has scrubbed and assisted in all specialties but is not shy about expressing his love for the neurosurgical and orthopedic specialties. Blackston has been an educator for more than 12 years, having served as the program director for surgical technology programs in Idaho and Montana and most recently, starting a new surgical technology program at North Idaho College, in Coeur d'Alene, ID.

Blackston served as ARC/STSA Accreditation Manager from April 2022-January 2023 and has served for more than 10 years as an ARC/STSA site visitor, and has also served on the Montana AST State Assembly's Board of Directors and the Idaho AST State Assembly as President. He has served as a panel member for the Core Curriculum for Surgical Technology, Seventh Edition, a member of the AST Education and Professional Standards Committee, and has been a contributor and reviewer for numerous surgical technology textbooks. In 2021, he was awarded the Fellow of the Association of Surgical Technology (FAST) designation.

Blackston earned his Master of Educational Technology, with a certificate in Online Teaching, from Boise State University, in 2018. He was awarded the Carolyn Thorson departmental award for excellence in educational technology and graduated with honors.

# TECHNOLOGIST VS. Technician

#### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE, AND WHY IT MATTERS

The US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor statistics defines the occupation of the surgical technologist - there is no occupation of surgical technician. CAAHEP accredits surgical technologist programs, not surgical technician programs. Here are some differences between a technician and a technologist.

### TECHNICIAN

#### **ENTRY LEVEL ROLE**

- Technician implies entry-level, basic knowledge
- Limited licensing

#### VOCATIONAL

- No standard educational pathway
- Can be a pathway to higher education

#### BASIC KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO DO SOMETHING

- Practical understanding of the method to do specific tasks on a specific piece of technology.
- Limited skillset and expertise.

## TECHNOLOGIST

#### **EXPERIENCED ROLE**

- Minimum educational training required that is more in-depth
- Often requires specific licensing and/or certification

#### **EDUCATIONAL**

 Standardized, accredited educational pathway leading to an associate or bachelor's degree

#### DEEPER KNOWLEDGE OF "THE WHYS"

- Possess a deeper scientific and empirical understanding of "the whys" behind what they do and of different facets of their technology.
- Must be critical thinkers and advanced problem solvers.

#### IN CONCLUSION

Technicians play an important support role and often work under technologists.

#### IN CONCLUSION

Technologists are experts in their field and sources of knowledge for their colleagues.



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