

Blue Ridge Community College

Times-News Column

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Do you ever watch ER, Grey's Anatomy, House, and other medical shows on television and wish you had gone into health care? Do you wish you had a chance to go back to school but can't spare the course preparation and two-plus years of schooling necessary to become a nurse? Are you conscientious, detail-oriented, and work well with people? If so, you may find the Surgical Technology program at Blue Ridge Community College to be the gateway to a new satisfying career.

Surgical technologists, also called scrubs and surgical or operating room technicians, assist in operations under the supervision of surgeons, registered nurses, and other surgical personnel. Surgical technologists are valued members of operating room teams, which most commonly include surgeons, anesthesiologists, and circulating nurses. Employment opportunities for surgical technologists include labor and delivery, emergency departments, inpatient/outpatient surgery centers, dialysis units/facilities, physician offices, veterinary offices, and central supply processing units.

The professional duties of a surgical technician are varied. Before an operation, surgical technologists help prepare the operating room by setting up surgical instruments and equipment, sterile drapes, and sterile solutions. They assemble both sterile and nonsterile equipment as well as checking and adjusting it, ensuring that it is working properly. Surgical Technologists also help get patients ready for surgery by washing, shaving, and disinfecting incision sites. They help transport patients to the operating room, help position them on the operating table, and cover them with sterile surgical drapes. Surgical Technologists also observe patient vital signs, check charts, and assist the surgical team.

During surgery, surgical technologists pass instruments and other sterile supplies to surgeons and surgeon assistants. They may hold retractors, cut sutures, and count sponges, needles, supplies, and instruments. Surgical technologists help prepare, care for, and dispose of specimens taken for laboratory analysis and help apply dressings. Some operate sterilizers, lights, or suction machines, and help operate diagnostic equipment. After an operation, surgical technologists may help transfer patients to the recovery room and clean and restock the operating room.

Graduates of Blue Ridge Community College Diploma program will be eligible to sit for the national certification exam obtaining their title of Certified Surgical Technologist, commonly referred to as "CST". Once certified, a Surgical Technologist can further their education and training to become a Certified First Assistant. (CFA) The surgical first assistant, as defined by the American College of Surgeons, provides aid in exposure, hemostasis, and other technical functions under the surgeon's direction that enable the surgical team to carry out a safe operation and provide patient safety.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Standards, the job outlook for surgical technologists looks stable: Employment of surgical technologists is expected to grow 24 percent between 2006 and 2016, much faster than the average for all occupations. The volume of surgeries should increase since the number of surgical procedures is expected to rise as the population grows and ages. In addition, technological advances such as fiber optics and laser technology will increase the number of new surgical procedures to be performed, allowing surgical technologists to assist with a greater number of procedures.

Applications for the Fall Semester 2012 Surgical Technology program at Blue Ridge Community College are available. If you would like to obtain more details about the Surgical Technology program, please feel free to contact Stephanie Kanupp at (829) 694-1831 or Student Services at (828) 694-1800.