The Registered Nurse Circulator and Safe Patient Care

A Joint Position Statement of the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association and the Virginia Council of periOperative Registered Nurses

(Approved: VHHA Board of Directors November 5, 2014; VCORN Board of Directors December 4, 2014)

Introduction
The members of the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) and the Virginia Council of periOperative Registered Nurses (VCORN) place the highest priority on patient safety. Health care often involves caring for patients at particularly vulnerable moments. The perioperative setting is a high-risk environment that potentially exposes the patient to adverse effects such as infection, hemorrhage, nerve injury, burns, wrong-site surgery, or death. Moreover, during surgery, most patients are anesthetized or sedated and are powerless to make decisions, ask questions, or advocate on their own behalf. These vulnerabilities increase patients’ risks. Consequently, health care providers take great precautions to ensure patient safety, including ensuring adequate staffing levels with the appropriate expertise to perform and assist in surgery as well as monitoring all aspects of the patient’s condition.

Registered Nurse Circulators
An operating room requires a large team, including surgeons, anesthesia care providers, nurses, surgical technologists, and others. In this team, the registered nurse (RN) circulator is responsible for managing all nursing care within the operating room, observing the surgical team from a broad perspective, and assisting the team to create and maintain a safe, comfortable environment for the patient’s surgery. Through professional and patient-centered expertise, the RN circulator serves as the primary patient advocate in the operating room and is responsible for monitoring all aspects of the patient’s condition. The RN circulator works collaboratively with other perioperative professionals to meet patient needs and supervises all nursing care provided during the surgical or invasive procedure.

Practice Recommendation
The practice in Virginia’s hospitals and health systems is to have an RN circulator present in each operating room for the entire procedure. RN circulators excel in addressing the responses of the patient having a surgical or invasive procedure by employing their years of didactic and clinical education, professional training, and personal commitment to the patient. VHHA and VCORN agree that having one RN circulator dedicated to each patient undergoing a surgical or other invasive procedure who is present for the duration of that patient’s intraoperative experience promotes the best possible outcomes for patients undergoing surgical procedures.

VHHA and VCORN recognize that there may be rare instances or emergency situations where an RN is unavailable to perform circulator duties personally in each operating room through the entire course of every procedure. In these exceptional instances hospitals and health systems deploy staff in the best interest of the patient, consistent with applicable laws and regulations, and taking into account patient acuity and the education, training and experience of the available health care personnel.
Hospitals, health systems, and perioperative registered nurses care deeply about their patients and are committed to providing the highest possible quality of care. VHHA and VCORN are pleased to have worked together to offer this statement on the critical role of the RN circulator in the perioperative setting and the important qualifications that RNs bring to such care.

Resources:

2. One Perioperative Registered Nurse Circulator Dedicated to Every Patient Undergoing a Surgical or Other Invasive Procedure, Position Statement of the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (August 2012).