

AORN Position Statement on the Value of Clinical Learning Activities in the Perioperative Setting in Undergraduate Nursing Curricula

POSITION STATEMENT

AORN believes:

- Perioperative clinical experience is a vital component of undergraduate nursing education and should be intentionally included in all professional nursing curricula. These experiences are essential to preparing practice-ready nurses and addressing the national shortage of perioperative professionals.^{1,2}
- The perioperative setting offers unique opportunities for students to apply both the art and science of nursing in a high-acuity environment that emphasizes patient safety, interdisciplinary collaboration, and complex clinical decision-making.¹
- Exposure to perioperative environments supports the development of safety-conscious nurses prepared for the high demands of surgical care, while also contributing to workforce sustainability.^{2,3}
- Perioperative clinical learning activities contribute to the development of essential nursing competencies, including critical thinking, situational awareness, application of the nursing process and clinical judgment, interdisciplinary teamwork and professional communication, patient advocacy and ethical practice, and understanding of systems-based care and safety protocols.^{1,4}
- Perioperative content and clinical skills should be taught and precepted by faculty and staff who are academically prepared and clinically experienced. This ensures that students practice and apply current, evidence-based, and safe practice standards.⁵
- Perioperative clinical experience may be delivered through direct clinical placement in operating room settings, simulation-based learning and structured debriefing, academic-practice partnerships, and perioperative practicums.^{6,7}
- Academic-practice partnerships demonstrate that immersive perioperative experiences increase student interest, competency, and readiness for practice.^{1,6}

RATIONALE

The perioperative setting allows for comprehensive application of the nursing process across the three phases of perioperative care, which are preoperative, intraoperative, and postoperative. Understanding intraoperative care enhances the holistic view of the patient experience across the continuum.⁶ This environment offers a unique platform for exploring patient safety principles, nursing theories and communication frameworks. Evidence shows that immersive perioperative learning paired with structured debriefing and interdisciplinary collaboration improves students' readiness, technical and soft skills, and interest in perioperative nursing.^{1,4} Additionally, early exposure and structured learning for students could reduce onboarding for experienced nurses transitioning to the operating room.⁵ All clinical settings, including the perioperative environment, offer valuable opportunities to meet program outcomes. Perioperative exposure can be incorporated through direct clinical placement, simulation, or academic-practice partnerships.

Perioperative nurse leaders have highlighted the significant shortage of perioperative nurses entering the workforce, attributing one factor to the removal of perioperative content from baccalaureate nursing programs in favor of broader generalist concepts.^{3,5}

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing's *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education* outlines the core competencies and expected outcomes for nursing education, guiding programs to prepare practice-ready nurses with the knowledge, skills, and professional values needed for safe, equitable, and high-quality patient care.⁸ Recent work by Vortman et al⁹ mapped perioperative nursing experiences to the AACN Essentials, demonstrating how the operating room can support all 10 competency-based education domains. The 10 AACN domains are:

1. Knowledge for nursing practice
2. Person-centered care
3. Population health
4. Scholarship for the nursing discipline
5. Quality and safety
6. Interprofessional partners
7. Systems-based practice
8. Informatics and healthcare technologies
9. Professionalism
10. Personal professional and leadership development.⁸

The inclusion of clinical learning activities in the perioperative setting in undergraduate nursing curricula ensures that students develop essential nursing competencies in the 10 AACN domains, while also meeting programmatic accreditation expectations for competency-based learning. Furthermore, perioperative clinical experiences are critical to developing and sustaining a robust pipeline of skilled perioperative nurses.

Research has demonstrated that perioperative electives and structured clinical placements increase students' perioperative communication, teamwork, and skills.¹⁰ Perioperative clinical learning activities provide students with increased exposure to the perioperative field, which allows them to make informed decisions about their future careers in the operating room.¹¹

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