

## NURSES WORK AT THE SURGICAL DEPARTMENT

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**Annotation:** The responsibilities of a surgical nurse include measuring and recording vitals, administering medication, and preparing patients for surgery. A surgical nurse, also referred to as a theatre nurse or scrub nurse, specializes in perioperative care, providing care to patients before, during and after surgery.

**Keywords:** surgical nurse, RN, PACU, ICU.

A surgical nurse is an umbrella term for registered nurses who specialize in perioperative care. Surgical nurses are responsible for patient care before, during and after surgery. Since there are several patient touch points, there are many nursing specialties to pursue. Uniquely, a surgical nurse can work in different departments. The surgical sub-specialties a registered nurse (RN) can learn are: pediatrics, neurology, general surgery, urology, cardiology, oncology and much more.

Teamwork and communication are key pillars to the operating room. A surgical nurse is the bridge between the patient and doctor, responsible for delivering information to both parties and relevant departments. They join surgeons and anesthesiologists as a complete unit who save patients' lives with a successful operation. Surgical nursing presents an abundance of career pathways to explore for registered nurse jobs, but what are the specific roles and responsibilities?



Surgery is classified into three phases: pre-operative phase, intraoperative phase and postoperative phase. Each phase requires specific types of care and activities when a patient undergoes surgery.

The moment a patient decides to undergo surgery, the nurse helps manage information delivery regarding the procedure, benefits and risk. Known as a circulating nurse, they simultaneously care for the patient's physical body and prepare their mental state as well. Typically, the patient and family members will express their concerns to learn more about the risks of the operation. As the first point of contact, the surgical

nurse relays their concerns to the surgeon and figures out the best course of action to minimize their anxiety. This role requires excellent communication skills, compassion and patience in order to establish trust between the patient and surgical team.

There are several nurse roles during the operating phase. Scrub nurses sterilize the operating room and hand instruments before surgery time. Proper disposal of biohazards require high attention to detail. Reducing cross-contamination is one of the biggest obstacles when preparing the room. RN first assistants (RNFAs) work with the surgeon to control bleeding, suture, bandage and dress wounds, monitor vitals and other critical tasks during surgery. Since this role presents many unique skills, certification in these areas are usually required by employers.

After surgery ends, the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) nurse immediately cares for the patient to stabilize their condition post-operation. Once the patient is transferred to the ICU, a PACU nurse shares their observations with the medical-surgical nurse who takes over as the primary care provider. They'll closely monitor the patient's vitals and run several tests periodically to ensure recovery. During this time, the RN will work with the team to develop a care plan and communicate with the patient on their treatment.

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