

Where Is The "Nursing" In The RNFA/PNS Role ?

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Many individuals who are not perioperative nurses struggle with the notion that the Registered Nurse First Assistant (RNFA) or Perioperative Nurse - Surgery (PNS) role is "nursing." The Canadian Nurses Association (1993) aptly states that an expert nurse's advanced practice may look very much like some of the activities of physicians, but that does not mean it is not nursing practice (p.20).

A review of RNFA and PNS literature makes it understandable why some cannot "see" the nursing. Much is made of the five unique intraoperative nursing behaviours of a RNFA:

- **Handling tissue;**
- **Providing exposure;**
- **Using instruments;**
- **Suturing; and,**
- **Providing haemostasis.**

Often little is articulated about the pre, post and other intra-operative nursing behaviours. The following definition and scope of practice was compiled for the College of Nurses of Ontario. Other individuals may find the following definition, role description and role responsibilities helpful. By articulating clearly what the RNFA role truly encompasses, only then can we move forward to have the role recognized and compensated across Canada.

Definition

The RNFA/PNS is an experienced perioperative nurse functioning at an advanced level of perioperative nursing practice.

Role Description

The RNFA/PNS provides continuity of care to clients requiring a surgical or diagnostic intervention.

The provision of this nursing care incorporates the promotion of health through pre and post-operative teaching, and the provision of care throughout the perioperative experience for the treatment of health conditions through supportive, therapeutic and palliative means in order to attain or maintain the client's optimal function.

The RNFA/PNS utilizes the nursing process to assess, plan, implement and evaluate the client's care throughout the perioperative experience.

The RNFA/PNS collaborates with the surgeon in performing a safe operation with optimal outcomes for the patient. The RNFA/PNS practices under the supervision of the surgeon during the intraoperative phase of the perioperative experience.

The RNFA/PNS utilizes knowledge gained through an intensive formal education program and a clinical internship to make autonomous and interdependent decisions regarding patient care in the performance of the role. In this role, the RNFA/PNS provides leadership through the integration of clinical practice, research and education.

Role Responsibilities

Preoperative nursing behaviours that can be performed by an RNFA/PNS include:

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- Providing preadmission management and planning.
- Obtaining the client's history and performing a health/physical assessment.
- Client/family/community teaching.
- Striving to assure that the client demonstrates knowledge of the physiologic and psychological responses to the operative or other invasive procedure.
- Providing client/family emotional support.
- Initiating the perioperative nursing plan of care in collaboration with the client and family.
- Initiating the discharge planning process.
- Assuring that the client's value system, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, and culture are considered, respected, and incorporated as appropriate in the perioperative plan of care, which reflects the client's level of function and ability during the perioperative period.
- Communicating the plan of care to the operating room staff, including any special needs of the client.

Intraoperative nursing behaviours that can be performed by an RNFA/PNS include:

- Application of the principles of asepsis, universal precautions and infection control..
- Coordination and provision of care to prevent the following negative client outcomes:
 - injury related to positioning;
 - injury due to extraneous objects;
 - injury related to transfer/transport;
 - injury related to physical/chemical/electrical/laser/radiation means; and,
 - infection.
- Anticipation of normal and abnormal human physiological responses to the surgical and anaesthetic intervention.
- Applying anatomy, physiology, disease pathology and operative technique relative to operative procedure.
- Performing client positioning, prepping and draping.
- Assisting in maintaining the client hemostasis status as directed by the surgeon (e.g. clamping blood vessels, coagulating bleeding points, ligating vessels).
- Providing exposure of the surgical site through the appropriate use of instruments, retractors, suctioning and sponging techniques as directed by the surgeon.
- Handling tissue as directed by the surgeon.
- Performing wound closure as directed by the surgeon (peritoneum, fascia, subcutaneous tissue and skin).

- Participating in, and working effectively as a multi-disciplinary team member.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of care provided on an ongoing basis.

Postoperative nursing behaviours that can be performed by an RNFA/PNS include:

- Performing post-operative assessments, including analysis of progression of wellness and any symptoms of complications.
- Providing postoperative teaching to the client/family, including discharge instructions.
- Coordinating postoperative client management and discharge planning.
- Assessing management of client's pain.
- Changing dressings and removing sutures, drains, catheters, or IVs as well as other behaviours delegated by the surgeon.
- Providing wound management.
- Providing collaboration and consultation on client care for optimal health maintenance.
- Identifying perioperative transition issues for the client.
- Sharing of knowledge, best practices, and research findings.
- Performing physician office visits that include any of the above behaviours, or follow-up care and procedures.
- Determining potential for making follow-up visits/communication to provide post-operative care or assessment.
- Assessing potential for follow-up for evaluation, quality assurance, and research purposes. ■

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