

## Being a Registered Nurse First Assistant in Quebec

I was asked to share a bit about my reality in the role of a Registered Nurse First Assistant (RNFA). I have been practising since 1999, and was trained in the first group of RNFAs in Quebec. The medical regulations to be able to practise in the future had to be changed, but even with that uncertainty, I still decided to register for the course. I wanted a challenge. I had been a nurse since 1986 and I started in the operating room in 1987. My training lasted three years (anatomy courses, pathology, clinical skills, and internship) at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR). At that time, the training was part-time. Now, with the help of government scholarships, students have the option to do an accelerated 18-month program or the long 36-month training. Since then, I have worked at the Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM). When I first arrived, I needed to be accepted by the residents who felt afraid of losing their jobs (fearing that I would take their place) and by my nursing colleagues, as well. It was not an easy task, but I persevered.

Mainly, I practise cardiac surgery, but I also practise other specialties, such as thoracic, vascular, orthopaedics, digestive, neurosurgery, plastic surgery, gynecology, urology, and, in many cases, use robotics (for example, urology, gynecology). As a teacher at UQTR, it is really important for me to share my knowledge and skills, gained over the years, with the next generation of young RNFAs starting out in this field. I have acquired a lot of experiences that give me more autonomy in my actions. For example, in cardiac surgeries, I collect saphenous veins and radial arteries myself. I assist the surgeons in all kinds of cases, even the most complicated and challenging ones (there are almost no cardiac residents at the CHUM). I was able to develop a bond with the surgeons and build an understanding between us. Most of the time, we don't even have to speak to one another. They do not even have to tell me what they need or what is coming next, because I know the surgical procedures and techniques. When there is a problem, I know what to do and what can help make the surgery run smoothly.

The role of RNFAs in Quebec has taken on more and more importance in both small and university centres, and even on the English-speaking side that had been closed from the get go. Since 2021, English-speaking hospitals have opened their doors to RNFAs. There are approximately 188 RNFAs who practise in approximately 30 hospitals and in private clinics, in different specialties depending on their centres. I am still here today after 26 years of practice, because I am still passionate about my job and this field. I do not regret my career choice. I love and cherish the chance to be able to keep learning today's new technologies and new operating techniques, and the opportunity to make a hands-on impact to the patients' cases.

**Hélène Tétreault,**  
**President of RNFA Quebec and Teacher at UQTR**

*Hélène Tétreault, Nurse at CHUM since 1986, Operating Room Nurse since 1987, a Member of CIISOQ - AIISOC since 1987, and a consultant and lecturer at UQTR.*

*I have been on the CIISOQ Board of Directors since 2016, and was a Founding member of RIPAC (Association of First Assistant Nurses in Surgery), of which I have been secretary, assistant president, and president since 2017.*

*RIPAC is part of CIISOQ (seat on the CIISOQ Board of Directors).*

*We also have our own board of directors. We are involved in various issues, including with UQTR, OIIQ, the Ministry of Education, and others. In 2017, I had to fight to prevent the closure of the program at UQTR. In 2021, I was also there when students were still having problems with UQTR. RIPAC is there for other IPACs.*

*Before the pandemic, we organized an IPAC day once a year, with training in the morning and the AGM in the afternoon. Our goal is to resume in-person meetings.*