

THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY (ARC-ST)/SUB-COMMITTEE ON ACCREDITATION FOR SURGICAL ASSISTING AND THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Accreditation is a system for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs affiliated with those institutions for a level of performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve. In the United States, this recognition is extended primarily through non-governmental, voluntary institutional or professional associations. Accreditation performs a number of important functions, including the encouragement of efforts toward maximum educational effectiveness. The accreditation process requires institutions and programs to examine their goals, activities, and achievements; to consider the expert criticism and suggestions of a visiting team; and to determine internal procedures for action on recommendations from the accrediting body. While accreditation is basically a private, voluntary process, accrediting decisions are used as a consideration in many formal actions by governmental funding agencies, scholarship commissions, foundations, employers, and potential students.

The Accreditation Review Committee on Education in Surgical Technology (ARC-ST) in cooperation with the Sub-Committee on Accreditation for Surgical Assisting (SASA) is the committee on accreditation that works directly with each surgical surgical assisting educational program in the accreditation process. The ARC-ST/SASA performs an on-site evaluation to gather data on each program and then meets twice a year to make recommendations, which are then forwarded to the Commission on Accreditation for Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). All program accreditation questions should be referred to the ARC-ST/SASA.

TYPES OF ACCREDITATION

Institutional accreditation is granted by regional and national accrediting commissions of schools and colleges. These commissions and associations accredit total operating units only.

Specialized accreditation of programs is granted by national professional organizations. Each group has its own distinctive criteria for accreditation, which is undertaken to provide quality assurances concerning the educational preparation of members of a profession.

SURGICAL ASSISTING PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

The specialized accreditation of programs in surgical assisting began in 2002, implementing standards of compliance that were developed by the collaborating organizations. The ARC-ST/SASA is composed of representatives from the American College of Surgeons (ACS), the Association of Surgical Technologists (AST) and the National Surgical Assistant Association (NSAA).

ACS, AST and NSAA cooperate to establish, maintain, and promote appropriate standards of quality for educational programs in surgical technology and to provide recognition for educational programs that meet or exceed the standards outlined in the *Standards and Guidelines for the Profession of Surgical Assisting*. The *Standards* are the minimum standards of quality used in accrediting programs that prepare individuals to enter the profession of surgical assisting. The extent to which a program complies with the standards determines its accreditation status; therefore, the *Standards* constitute the minimum requirements to which an accredited program is held accountable.

On the basis of compliance with the *Standards* and recommendation of the ARC-ST/SASA, accreditation is granted by CAAHEP. CAAHEP, in cooperation with the ARC-ST, is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a non-governmental body which reviews and recognizes accrediting agencies.

Specialized accreditation of a surgical assisting program involves thorough review of the program's resources including faculty, student/faculty ratio, financial resources, physical resources, learning resources, admissions policies, student records, curriculum, and student evaluation methods. Only schools, colleges, hospitals, or branches of the military that have the appropriate institutional accreditation can apply for specialized accreditation for their surgical technology program. Accreditation of surgical technology programs is an on-going process in which accredited programs must submit reports annually to ensure continuing compliance with established criteria and are formally reviewed at least once every 10 years.