

Surgical First Assistants (SFAs)

Statement by the Intercollegiate Extended Surgical Team Board (IESTB) on behalf of the Surgical Royal Colleges in the UK and Ireland

Surgical First Assistants (SFA) are registered practitioners who provide competent and dedicated assistance to an operating surgeon throughout an operation. SFAs practice as part of the surgical team, under the direct supervision of the operating surgeon. They are required to have successfully completed a validated university programme of study that meets the nationally recognised standards underpinning the knowledge and skills required for the role.

The Intercollegiate Extended Surgical Team Board (IESTB) on behalf of the Surgical Royal Colleges of the UK and Ireland are aware of anecdotal evidence that SFAs are being asked to work outside the clinical skills in which they have been trained. This is particularly as bedside assistants in robot assisted surgery. (RAS)

The practise of asking SFAs to undertake tasks outside the competencies of their scope of practice raises significant concerns about patient safety, indemnity and regulatory compliance and potentially puts both the patient and the practitioner at risk.

Employers in the NHS and in the Independent Sector should ensure that the job description of SFAs in their employment clearly complies with the scope of practice or boundaries¹ reflecting the level of training and competency achieved through a validated university programme of study.

SFA scope of practice may need to be enhanced to meet local service developments.

If an SFA wishes to progress their skills to meet local service need, a full role and service provision review should be completed. If the role requires significant expansion, training as a Surgical Care Practitioner should be considered.

The role of bedside assistant in RAS is not within the scope of practice / skill competences of an SFA or an SFA with an enhanced scope of practice.

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