

**Department of Health
Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission**

Advisory Opinion

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC) issues this advisory opinion in accordance with WAC 246-840-800. An advisory opinion adopted by the Nursing Commission is an official opinion about safe nursing practice. The opinion is not legally binding and does not have the force and effect of a duly promulgated regulation or a declaratory ruling by the Nursing Commission. Institutional policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations to assure the safety of their patient and/or decrease risk.

Title:	Perioperative Registered Nurse First Assistant (RNFA)	Number: NCAO 1.10
References:	RCW 18.79 Nursing Care WAC 246-840 Practical and Registered Nursing Practice Information: Glossary of Terms Interactive Scope of Practice Decision Tree RN and LPN Scope of Practice Advisory Opinion	
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Approved By:	Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC)	

Conclusion Statement

The registered nurse (RN) who can demonstrate the necessary competencies, may function in the position as the perioperative registered nurse first assistant (RNFA) within their legal, individual scope of practice following clinical practice standards. Because of the complexity of this role, the NCQAC determines that it is not within the scope of practice for the licensed practical nurse (LPN) to function as the perioperative nurse first assistant. The LPN may assist the circulating RN or function as scrub nurse up to their training and competencies, under the direction of the surgeon or under the direction and supervision of the RN to perform non-complex and routine procedures. The LPN may or assist the surgeon or other [authorized health care practitioner](#) or RN in performing complex procedures.

Background

The RNFA is a title commonly used for a perioperative RN that functions as surgical first assistant during perioperative procedures. The RNFA practices in an expanded role in perioperative nursing to provide direct assistance to the surgeon in all phases of surgery. The complexity of the surgery determines when a RNFA is necessary. According to the [Association of periOperative Registered Nurses \(AORN\)](#), the RNFA is defined by the following:

- Works in collaboration with the surgeon and other healthcare team members to achieve optimal patient outcomes;
- Has acquired the necessary knowledge, judgment, and skills specific to the expanded role of RNFA clinical practice;
- Intraoperatively practices at the direction of the surgeon; and
- Does not concurrently function as a scrub person.

Institutions may define job descriptions as more restrictive than the legal scope of practice or require special certification or training. The role of the RNFA and prerequisites may vary on the institution and will also vary depending on the surgeon. It is important to clarify there is a difference between the use of the position title of RNFA and the use of a nurse who has a certification, such as a CRNFA. Factors influencing these decisions include accreditation standards, reimbursement requirements, risk and liability. Institutions may require the RNFA to go through the credentialing and privileging process.

Laws and Rules

The nursing laws and rules do not require certification for the RN to function in the RNFA position. [RCW 18.79.040](#).

- "Registered nursing practice" means the performance of acts requiring substantial specialized knowledge, judgment, and skill based on the principles of the biological, physiological, behavioral, and sociological sciences in either:
- The executing of medical regimen as prescribed by a licensed physician and surgeon, dentist, osteopathic physician and surgeon, podiatric physician and surgeon, physician assistant, osteopathic physician assistant, or advanced registered nurse practitioner, or as directed by a licensed midwife within his or her scope of practice.

Recommendations

While not required by law or rule, the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC) advises formal certification in perioperative nursing and successful completion of a RNFA program that meets the AORN standards. Examples of certification include the [Certified Registered Nurse First Assistant \(CRNFA\)](#) and the [Registered Nurse Assistant at Surgery Certification \(RNASC-C\)](#) issued by the [National Assistant at Surgery Certification \(NASC\) Organization](#).

The NCQAC recommends following current *AORN Standards and Recommended Practices for Perioperative Nursing*, *AORN Competency Statements for RNFA*s. The NCQAC recommends the facility establish a process to grant clinical privileges to the RNFA.

Robotic surgery, computer-assisted surgery, and robot-assigned surgery are terms for various technological developments used to support a range of surgical procedures. The advances in technology in the health care setting is a critical aspect of the perioperative nurse's role. To keep abreast of these changes, the perioperative nurse must maintain and update their practice and competencies to ensure safe patient care.

Conclusion

RNs may function in the position as an RNFA in the perioperative setting up to the fullest extent within their individual and legal scope of practice.

References

- [Association of periOperative Registered Nurses \(AORN\) Website](#)
- [National Assistant at Surgery Certification \(NASC\) Organization](#)