NSW Operating Theatre Association Inc (NSW OTA Inc)
Position Statement

Allocation of Assistants in Nursing in the Perioperative Environment

The Mission Statement of the New South Wales Operating Theatre Association Inc (NSW OTA) is:
“Leading perioperative nurses to achieve excellence in patient care”. ¹

PURPOSE

This Position Statement provides direction for perioperative nurses in New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) on the allocation of the Assistant in Nursing (AIN) in the perioperative environment.

In doing so, this Position Statement:
- clarifies the terminology currently used by the nursing profession;
- clarifies the levels of qualification, the relevant regulation and policy in regards to AINs;
- draws attention to the difference between:
  - the undergraduate nursing student employed at the award level of AIN;
  - the Certificate III qualified AIN; and
  - the non-certified AIN

and
- provides recommendations for the employment and subsequent levels of supervision for these workers in the perioperative environment

RATIONALE

The NSW OTA acknowledges that the perioperative environment is a highly specialised, acute-care area of nursing, where patient safety is underpinned by the employment of appropriately educated and skilled nurses. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) ² identifies the correlation between patient outcomes and the educational preparation of nursing staff. Accordingly, the NSW OTA believes that best practice in the perioperative environment is achieved when appropriately educated registered nurses and enrolled nurses deliver patient care.

This position is supported by the Australian College of Operating Room Nurses (ACORN). The ACORN Position Statement on the Ancillary Worker states:
“ACORN upholds the patient’s right to the highest quality nursing care during surgical intervention. The patient’s surgical outcome is influenced by the competence, that is, knowledge, skill and attitude, of the qualified nurse. This is achieved by the nurse performing the roles of the anaesthetic nurse, instrument nurse, circulating and post anaesthetic recovery nurses. All direct patient care activities should be undertaken by qualified nursing staff or appropriately supervised nurses in training” ³
DEFINITIONS OF NURSING ROLES

Nurse
The Nurses & Midwives Act, 1991, states:
"Nurse means registered or enrolled nurse".  

Registered nurses and enrolled nurses have the educational preparation and competence required to hold an annual licence to practise. As such, registered nurses and enrolled nurses are regulated by the nursing profession and are bound by the standards of registration boards.

Non-Nurses, Support Workers and Unlicensed Workers
These terms refer to healthcare workers who are not eligible for authorisation to practise as a registered or enrolled nurse. It should be noted that these workers are not regulated by the nursing profession and are not bound by the standards of registration boards.

The Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council’s definition of non-nurse support workers includes AINs. Other professional bodies such as The Australian College of Nursing, (ACON) and the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) designate AINs in the same group and context as “other unlicensed workers”.

Assistant in Nursing
The NSW Nurses Association (NSWNA) has an industrial award classification for AINs and a policy on AINs, which states:
"Assistants in Nursing assist in the provision of basic nursing care, working with a plan of care under the supervision and direction of a registered nurse." 

and further:
"Nursing care is provided by registered nurses and enrolled nurses.”

The activities that may be delegated to the AIN are dependent upon the education and clinical competence of the AIN, the patient acuity, the technical skills required of the activity and the supervision of the RN.

AINs employed in NSW Health acute care environments are to have completed the qualification, HLT32507 Certificate III Health Services Assistance (Descriptor: Assisting in Nursing Work in Acute Care) or have equivalent experience or have completed 1 or more years training as an undergraduate nursing student.

AINs currently employed in NSW Health acute care areas, who are not current undergraduate students of nursing or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Cadets, will be supported by Health Services to upgrade their qualification to the level of HLT32507 Certificate III Health Services Assistance: - Assisting in Nursing Work in Acute Care skills pathway.

Undergraduate Nursing Student
The Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council (ANMC) defines a student as one who is enrolled in an educational program leading to the eligibility to apply for registration as a nurse.
Undergraduate nursing students may be employed as AINs. This employment provides students with increased exposure to clinical environments in preparation to practice as a nurse and the opportunity to gain an income while studying. The scope of practice for the undergraduate student of nursing employed as an AIN in the NSW Public Health System is consistent with that outlined in the NSW Health Assistant in Nursing Acute Care Position Description.

REGULATION OF NURSES

Regulation aims to protect the safety of the public by providing standards of conduct and codes of ethics and ultimately, provide a mechanism that ensures that health professionals are fit to practise.

The Australian Nurses and Midwives Board is responsible for registering nurses and their functions are supported by Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (APHRA)

AINs are not eligible for registration with the APHRA nor are they regulated by any other licensing authority in New South Wales. Registered nurses and enrolled nurses, however, are regulated by the nursing profession and are bound by the standards of registration boards.

GUIDELINES FOR DELEGATION AND SUPERVISION OF NURSES

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) have set national standards for statutory nursing and midwifery regulation. This has been achieved through the development of ANMC National Competency Standards for the Registered and the Enrolled Nurse. These competency standards are maintained by ANMC and include reference to the delegation and supervision of nurses.

Within the ANMC Guidelines for the Delegation and Supervision for Nurses and Midwives the term supervision is used as follows:

**Supervision** - incorporates the elements of direction, guidance, oversight and co-ordination of activities. Supervision may be direct or indirect.

**Direct supervision** - is provided when the registered nurse or midwife is actually present, observes works with and directs the person who is being supervised.

**Indirect supervision** - is provided when the registered nurse or midwife is easily contactable but does not directly observe the activities.

AINs and enrolled nurses require support to make decisions on determining whether delegated activities are within their scope of practice.

AINs shall, at all times, work under the direct or indirect supervision of the registered nurse. They are accountable for their own actions and accountable to the registered nurse for any delegated activities.
RECOMMENDATION

The NSW OTA recommends that perioperative nursing roles, which include Anaesthetic, Circulating, Instrument and Post Anaesthetic Care roles, shall be allocated to registered nurses and enrolled nurses in line with ACORN Staffing Standard and Position Statements.

The NSW OTA supports the allocation of AINs in supportive roles. The allocation of AINs in this instance shall not replace the nursing staff. Rather, the allocation of AINs shall supplement the nursing staff working in these perioperative roles. For example:

- The employment of undergraduate nursing students at the NSWNA award level of AINs may be allocated to assist registered and enrolled nurses in their roles, i.e. assistant circulator, or in anaesthetics as an extra person in a list, working under the direct supervision of the RN when involved in the delivery of direct patient care. These duties will be delegated dependant upon education (Public Sector employers should refer the PD2010_059 for specific requirements)

- Certificate III qualified AINs may be allocated to technical support and clerical roles only, such as CSSD, stock rooms, utility areas, computer support which do not involve direct patient care. These AINs may work under the indirect supervision of the RN.

- Non certified AINs do not demonstrate the necessary level of education and clinical competence required to meet the needs of the perioperative patient nor do they have the level of technical competence and therefore should not be employed in the perioperative environment.

REFERENCES

7. NSW Department of Health. Employment of Assistants in Nursing (AIN) in NSW Health Acute Care, Policy Directive PD2010_059