



Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation Working Together

Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation Operating Department Nurses Section

Position Statement on the Operating Department Practitioner (ODP)

April 2011

Position Statement

In Ireland, historically and currently, registered nurses perform the perioperative scrub, circulating, anaesthetic and recovery roles. These nurses, along with all other nurses and midwives, are regulated by An Bord Altranais.

The Operating Department Nurses (ODN) section believes that individuals, who are not registered to practice nursing, and who perform in the role of anaesthetic, scrub, circulating or recovery nurses, are performing without a professional licence, a practice that cannot be allowed in the interests of patient safety.

The ODN section believes that to achieve optimal patient outcomes in the perioperative environment, the operating department nurse should maintain their current roles in all areas of theatre.

The ODN section believes that with the continued technological advances in surgical and anaesthetic care, a continued presence in all roles within the operating department enhances the operating department nurse's ability to assess, implement and evaluate a plan of care.

Registered general nurses who fulfil the criteria for specialist training in the perioperative setting undergo a one year full time perioperative course, which is provided in collaboration with universities and health service providers. Successful completion of this course leads to a Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Nursing (Perioperative) at Level 9 of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland framework. Whilst a further specialist qualification is not a prerequisite to working in theatre, most theatre nurses undertake this at some point in their careers (Tanner and Timmons, 2000).

Whilst there may have been some impression that the Operating Department Practitioner (see preamble below for further details on ODP) could provide a "cheaper" alternative to the theatre nurse, it is important to point out that neither profession can be seen as a "cheap" substitute for the other, as both nurses and ODPs earn comparable salaries in the UK. Therefore it is difficult to see the value of replacement of operating theatre nurses in Ireland, with qualified ODPs, in terms of cost benefit. Currently due to the recruitment moratorium, graduate nurses in Ireland are not being employed. These nurses are trained to a high standard at a cost to the state, and those who wish, should be trained to work in the perioperative environment in Ireland. This would offer value for money in terms of the cost to train a nurse, and would maintain the numbers of operating theatre nurses, replacing those who retire.

There has been an ongoing conflict in the UK between the two professions, which Timmons and Tanner (2004) investigate in their paper *A disputed occupational boundary: Operating Theatre Nurses and Operating Department Practitioners*. This demonstrates the importance of thoroughly evaluating the needs, benefits and drawbacks of adding another grade of staff to the health service.

The experience of a general nurse's training should not be underestimated. He /she on qualification, is a multi-skilled practitioner who has a broad training beyond the critical perioperative setting. While perioperative nurses work in the operating department, they have experience of pre and post operative care, and critically understand the implication of nursing interventions performed both in theatre and in the wider context of the patient's hospital journey. Nurse training is inclusive of primary care, acute hospital care, and care continued in the community for patients discharged from the acute setting. It is questionable whether there is any value to be gained in introducing another grade of health care worker who is not qualified to work outside of the perioperative environment.

Preamble

Role of the perioperative nurse

Perioperative nurses are healthcare professionals who promote standards for safe perioperative practice. Perioperative nurses optimise a positive patient experience *throughout the surgical pathway* within the perioperative setting.

As key members of the multi-disciplinary team, perioperative nurses provide competent and effective patient-focussed quality care.

Perioperative nurses manage and protect the patient's experience by:

- Supporting the views/beliefs of the patient and acting as the patient's guardian throughout the perioperative care pathway
- Assessing, planning, co-ordinating, implementing and evaluating individual patient care
- Promoting and maintaining a safe environment through effective risk management
- Promoting and maintaining professional knowledge and technical skills through education, clinical supervision, reflective practice and evidence based practice
- Sustaining awareness of ethical and legal issues
(NATN February 2005)

History of the Operating Department Assistant(ODA) / Operating Department Practitioner (ODP)

In the 1970's, the National Health Service (NHS) sought to address perennial shortages of theatre nurses, which had led to increased waiting lists, by creating a new grade of health care worker – Operating Department Practitioners (ODPs), also called Operating Department Assistants (ODAs). Training for this new grade, however, was ad hoc from hospital to hospital. From 1991 regulation insisted that the only practitioner permitted to call themselves an ODP, was one who had obtained a NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level 3 in Operating Department Practice. Indeed until 2003, anyone could call themselves an ODP without any formal qualifications (Timmons and Tanner, 2004).

The Operating Department Practitioner(ODP) - the UK perspective

ODPs are healthcare professionals working in the United Kingdom. They are mainly employed in Operating Departments, but can also be found in other clinical areas including Accident and Emergency, Intensive Care Units, and the Ambulance Service.

The title of Operating Department Practitioner is protected and the profession is currently regulated in the UK by the Health Professions Council (HPC). Since October 2004 it has been a statutory requirement to be registered to work as an Operating Department Practitioner.

The College of Operating Department Practitioners (CODP) sets out minimum educational requirements for ODPs as well as their professional registration. Similar to nursing in Ireland, there is a move to become an all graduate entry profession with a new three year BSc (Hons) ODP degree starting in 2012, which will become the criterion for registration.

“ODPs provide high standards of patient care and skilled support alongside medical and nursing colleagues during the anaesthetic, surgical and recovery phases of the perioperative period. The ODP's role involves the application of theory to practice in a variety of clinical settings. The ODP is, therefore, required to have a broad knowledge and skill base, in addition to management and communication skills and will be involved with the assessment, implementation and evaluation of perioperative care which can be divided into three interconnected phases. These phases being the anaesthetic phase, the surgical phase and the recovery phase”.

Patient care remains the focus throughout the surgical phase and ODPs undertake, as part of the operative team, a number of roles including the 'scrubbed' role, application of aseptic technique, wound management and infection control.
(COPD, 2010)



Learning from the UK experience

In the UK, theatre nurses qualify following a three year programme leading to registration at BSc Level 8. Like their Irish colleagues, theatre nurses in the UK may also proceed to a specialist perioperative qualification. Also similar to their Irish counterparts, UK theatre nurses may be found working in all areas of the perioperative field, e.g. anaesthetic nurse, scrub nurse, circulating nurse, recovery nurse and all grades of operating theatre department management.

The ODP follows a two year educational programme leading to a Diploma in Higher Education in Operating Department Practice. However, this will be replaced by a three year degree in 2012. Currently the ODP in the UK has similar career prospects to the operating department nurse and can work in all areas of the perioperative field.

Bull and Fitzgerald (2006) note that the necessity of combining technological proficiency and providing evidence based nursing care for the patient in the Operating department is taken for granted by nurses. This in itself is not unique to the operating department. They also note that technology is everywhere that nurses practice, and is part of their implied understanding of their work. The emphasis on equipment and technology in the Operating Department demands that perioperative nurses make a special effort to recognise the primary importance of the patient. They must continually adapt their knowledge and skills to the new equipment and adjust to the changing values and expectations that accompany the equipment and associated advances in surgical ability and outcome. Meeting the challenges and successfully mastering the new technology is rewarded with respect, a gain in confidence and associated development of their professional abilities.

Perioperative registered nurses have defined practice standards for the scrub person (Rothrock 2003, pp.2-5). Perioperative registered nursing practice incorporates the cognitive, behavioural, and technical components of professional nursing. When functioning in the scrub role, the perioperative registered nurse augments his or her ability to anticipate, plan for, and respond to the needs of the patient, surgeon, and other team members. The perioperative registered nurse is cognisant of patient responses to both planned and unplanned surgical events and contributes to the overall well-being of a patient by being vigilant in assessing the patient's condition as it is demonstrated within the surgical field and by visual monitoring devices.

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