



Arizona State Board of Nursing

1740 W. Adams Street, Suite 2000
Phoenix, AZ 85007
Phone (602) 771-7800
Home Page: www.azbn.gov

An advisory opinion adopted by AZBN is an interpretation of what the law requires. While an advisory opinion is not law, it is more than a recommendation. In other words, an advisory opinion is an official opinion of AZBN regarding the practice of nursing as it relates to the functions of nursing. Facility policies may restrict practice further in their setting and/or require additional expectations related to competency, validation, training, and supervision to assure the safety of their patient population and or decrease risk.

**OPINION: REGISTERED NURSE
FIRST ASSISTANT - RNFA
APPROVED: 10/87
REVISED DATE: 1/02, 7/04, 7/07, 3/11, 9/13,
7/14, 9/17, 9/20, 3/26
ORIGINATING COMMITTEE:
SCOPE OF PRACTICE COMMITTEE**

Within the Scope of Practice of X RN LPN

ADVISORY OPINION REGISTERED NURSE FIRST ASSISTANT – RNFA

It is within the scope of practice of a registered nurse (RN) who can demonstrate the necessary education, knowledge, judgment, certification, and skills, to practice as a RN first assistant (RNFA), assisting the surgeon during surgical procedures. The RNFA is not authorized to independently perform a surgical procedure which is the primary purpose of the surgery.

I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- A. The RNFA complies with the policies as delineated by the employer/facility and meet the requirements of the credentialing review committee (if any).
- B. The RNFA assists the surgeon in the performance of surgical procedures and shall function as an RNFA only when the surgeon is immediately available in the practice setting throughout the entire course of the operative procedure.
- C. Effective January 1, 2020, the Association of Operating Room Nurses (AORN) has determined that:
 1. The minimal education level for an RNFA will be a baccalaureate degree in any field
 2. RNFAs that do not have a baccalaureate degree but are practicing prior to January 1, 2020 will be allowed to continue practicing as RNFA.

II. QUALIFICATIONS

The minimum qualifications to practice as an RNFA are:

- A. Certification: Certified Nurse of the Operation Room (CNOR)
- B. Successful completion of an approved RNFA program that meets AORN RNFA criteria.
- C. Compliance with all statutes, regulations, and institutional policies related to the role of the RNFA.
- D. A baccalaureate degree in any field with exception of the RNFA practicing prior to Jan 1, 2020 who may continue to practice at his/her level of education.

Notes: Advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) practicing as an RNFA in Arizona prior to January 1, 2016 may continue practice. APRNs not actively working as an RNFA prior to this date must acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to provide safe and competent surgical first assistant

services by completing a program that meets the content of the AORN standards of first assistant education programs. This may be a stand-alone program or a portion of a graduate or post-graduate program (e.g.,-additional course work included in a graduate APRN program).

Certified nurse midwives/certified midwives (CNM/CM) assisting in obstetrical/gynecological (OB/GYN) surgeries, refer to the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) 2023 position statement, which states: “A specific credential external to the midwifery profession is not necessary for the CNM/CM to function as first assist during OB/GYN surgery, as ACNM Standards VIII provides for a competency-based approach to expanding skills and practice as a midwife.”

III. ROLE FUNCTION

RNFA responsibilities in the perioperative arena include, but are not limited to:

- A. Preoperative patient management in collaboration with other health care providers, such as:
 - 1. Performing focused preoperative nursing assessments,
 - 2. Communicating and collaborating with other health care providers regarding the surgical patient plan of care
- B. Intraoperative performance of RNFA techniques as in:
 - 1. Using surgical instruments and medical devices
 - 2. Providing surgical site exposure,
 - 3. Handling and/or cutting tissue,
 - 4. Providing hemostasis,
 - 5. Suturing
 - 6. Wound management
- C. Postoperative patient management in collaboration with other health care providers in the immediate postoperative period and beyond, such as:
 - 1. Participating in postoperative rounds
 - 2. Assisting with patient discharge planning and identifying appropriate community resources as needed.

IV. RATIONALE

The Board of Nursing recognizes the role of the RNFA as being within the scope of practice of an RN and endorses the AORN expectations and position statement on RN first assistants.

V. REFERENCES

American College of Nurse-Midwives. (2018). *Position statement: The certified nurse midwife/certified midwife as first assistant during surgery*. Retrieved from <http://www.midwife.org/acnm/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFDILENAME/00000000270/PS-First-Assist-Revisions-FINAL>

Association of periOperative Room Nurses. (2014). AORN Standards for RN First Assistant Education Program. Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/Owner/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge-8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/RNFA-Education-Standards%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Owner/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge-8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/RNFA-Education-Standards%20(1).pdf)

Association of periOperative Registered Nurses. (2018). Position statement on RN First Assistants. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Owner/AppData/Local/Temp/AORN_Position_StatementRNFA.pdf

Association of periOperative Registered Nurses. (2020). RN First Assistant Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.aorn.org/guidelines/clinical-resources/rn-first-assistant-resources>

Association of periOperative Registered Nurses. (2020). AORN Position statement on Advanced Practice Registered Nurses in the Perioperative Environment. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/Owner/AppData/Local/Temp/PosStat-RNFA-Advanced-Practice-RN->

Iowa Board of Nursing. (2016). Registered nurse first assistant. Retrieved from <https://nursing.iowa.gov/practice/position-statements-and-papers-adopted-iowa-board-nursing/registered-nurse-first-assistant>

Kentucky Board of Nursing. (2025). AOS#8 Nurses Practicing in the Perioperative Setting. Retrieved from <https://kbn.ky.gov/KBN%20Documents/aos8-nurses-perioperative-setting.pdf>

National Assistant at Surgery Certification. (2020). RNFA scope of practice, standards of practice, and certification. <https://www.nascertification.com/rnfa-scope-of-practice>

Position Statement: The Certified Nurse-Midwife/Certified Midwife as First Assistant during Surgery. American College of Nurse-Midwives. 2017. Accessed January 2, 2026. <https://www.midwife.org/acnm/files/ACNMLibraryData/UPLOADFILENAME/000000000270/PS-First-Assist-Revisions-FINAL-Feb%202018.pdf>

South Carolina Board of Nursing. (2023). Advisory opinion #13: Registered nurse first assistant. South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. <https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/entities/publication/43219db3-e003-4e45-86c6-da68b589efee>

The Essential Role of the Doctor of Nursing Practice-Prepared Nurse in Perioperative Services: A White Paper. AORN, Inc. 2021. Accessed January 2, 2026. <https://www.aorn.org/guidelines-resources/clinical-resources/whitepapers/the-essential-role-of-the-doctor-of-nursing-practice-prepared-nurse-in-perioperative-services>

Van Wicklin, S. A. (2021). Determining scope of practice. *Plastic Surgical Nursing*, 41(1), 40-42.

Washington Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission. (2021). Department of Health Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission advisory opinion: Registered nurse first assistant (RNFA). Retrieved from <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/6000/NCAO1.10.pdf>