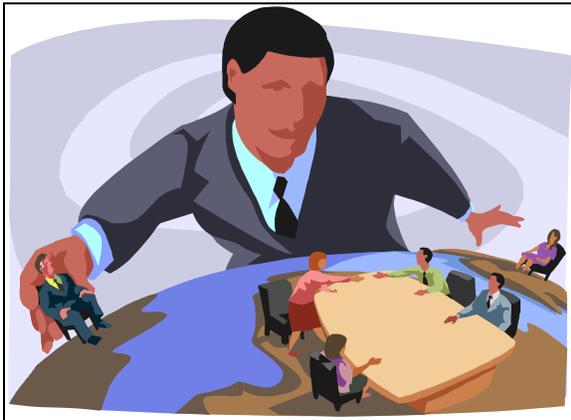


What exactly is the Sterile Processing Team Leader's Responsibility? Katrina Simpson, B.S., CST, CSPDT

Objectives:

Distinguish the difference between a lead technician, supervisor, manager, and director.

Discuss the primary role of a sterile processing lead technician.



Lead technician, supervisor, manager, or director; what's the difference?

When you hear the word LEAD or LEADER what description comes to mind? According to Allan Wong a leader is described as such: "a person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal" (Wong, 2007). Within the sterile processing department the common goal is patient safety and nothing less than that. Let's dig a bit further. When you hear the terms supervisor, manager, and director what does those terms mean to you? Do all of these terms have the same meaning? Or maybe you feel as if one title is more superior to the other? Hopefully, you will find in this article that the answers to these questions will be revealed. Okay, now to break each role down so that we can gain a better perspective. When you research several job descriptions provided throughout the nation you will find that the lead sterile processing technician description may vary from city to city, state to state, or facility to facility. The most common description presented stated that the lead sterile processing technician often serves as a "back-up" for the department's supervisor. According to Hillcrest Hospital in Ohio, the lead technician is further responsible for the following: "Performs and serves as a resource for decontamination, inspection, assembly, and sterilization of all basic and specialized complex instrumentation, and troubleshoots equipment or product failure" (Minute Men Media, 2014). Now again this may vary from facility to facility, but in a nutshell, the lead technician is responsible for facilitating the duties of the sterile processing and in most cases are the ones responsible for working right along with the sterile processing technicians within the sterile processing department.

A supervisor normally has more than two years' experience in sterile processing either as a technician, lead technician, or previous supervisory role depending on the facility. Supervisors operate beneath the manager and have various responsibilities similar to the lead technician. A supervisor should also possess a certification in sterile processing. They are responsible for scheduling and coordinating all activities within the sterile processing department to ensure a smooth working flow. The supervisor also works "hand-on" with sterilizing, prep and preparation, and multiple other duties within the sterile processing department to facilitate work flow as needed.

The manager is who the supervisor usually reports to within the sterile processing department. Your sterile processing manager usually has previous experience in sterile processing, surgical technology, or the nursing field. They are also certified individuals in sterile processing. Through research you will find that most facilities across the country require a minimum of five years' experience in sterile processing and a minimum of two to three years' experience in the supervisory role. Furthermore, most facilities require at the minimum a Bachelor's degree to serve as a manager. Some facilities may only require an Associate degree. Other facilities may require as high as a Master's degree before they will consider someone to operate as a manager within the sterile processing department. The sterile processing manager is responsible for duties conducted within their department on a 24 hour bases, unlike the lead technician or supervisor. According to the job description provided by Bay Care Health in Florida, the manager furthermore has these duties: "The Manager; Sterile Processing is a leader within the health system who demonstrates proficiency in all Quality Leadership skills. Expertly manages the entire operation surrounding the sterile processing of instruments and other items necessary to conduct patient care throughout the hospital" (Bay Care

Health, 2014). The manager has to have the ability to think quickly, problem-solve, delegate, and work with a diverse group of individuals.



The operating manager in sterile processing works under the director, if the facility has one. Your director can be over not only the sterile processing department, but the operating room, PACU, and Pre-Op departments as well just to name a few. Directors usually have more than five years of experience managing. Several facilities across the nation require a Master's degree for a position as a director within the sterile processing department. Degrees should be in Nursing, Business, or any other Health-related studies. Some facilities will only hire registered nurses for both manager and director positions within the sterile processing department. Your director's should also be nationally certified. It is critical that they have skills in organizational leadership, critical thinking, budgetary skills, project management, communication, conflict resolution, and Joint Commission, AORN, CDC, AAMI, and OSHA regulations. A specific description for the sterile processing director is as follows: "The Department Director plans, organizes, manages and directs the activities of the hospital department(s). This position has continuous operational authority and responsibility for accomplishments of the hospital departmental goals and objectives" (Oregon Health and Science University, 2014). The director's role is very busy. They often rely on the managers and supervisors of the department to assist in maintaining quality control.

What is specific role does the lead technician provide?

So finally, what exactly do the lead sterile processing technician job duties include? Are you currently acting as a lead tech without the necessary "title" as one? Sure you are! Most of you reading this letter are lead technicians! You have lead technicians in some facilities for each shift: first, second, and third. Let's further examine the responsibilities so that you can determine if you are currently operating as a lead technician. Lead technician responsibilities include all of the following, but are not limited to:

- Decontaminating and sterilizing medical supplies and equipment
- Preparing and packaging medical supplies and equipment
- Responsible for documenting sterilized items
- Responsible for department in absence of the manager
- Assist with staffing and planning throughout the department
- Order necessary supplies and equipment

Regardless if the role is in being a lead technician, supervisor, or manager, they all have one specific requirement that is critical to the success of the sterile processing department; that skill is the ability to LEAD.

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Post-Test 2014

- 1. A leader does not have the ability to influence a group of people towards a common goal.
TRUE FALSE
- 2. Every hospital within the nation has the exact job descriptions for sterile processing techs in every facility.
TRUE FALSE
- 3. The lead sterile processing technician is not responsible for preparing instruments for sterilization.
TRUE FALSE
- 4. The lead sterile processing technician often serves as a “back-up” for the sterile processing department’s supervisor.
TRUE FALSE
- 5. It is unnecessary for a supervisor to be or become certified.
TRUE FALSE
- 6. Some facilities require managers to have Bachelor’s degrees.
TRUE FALSE
- 7. The manager reports to the supervisor.
TRUE FALSE
- 8. The manager works underneath the director of the sterile processing department if the facility has a director.
TRUE FALSE
- 9. A director does not need skills in communication or organizational leadership.
TRUE FALSE
- 10. Assist with staffing and planning throughout the department is one of the job duties of the lead sterile processing technician.
TRUE FALSE

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