



AHA, AAMC Urge Hospitals to Review Updated American College of Surgeons Statements on Principles and Make Any Needed Changes to Hospital Policies

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The American College of Surgeons (ACS) recently released [Statements on Principles](#) on the responsibility of the primary surgeon during surgery. Recent news reports have raised questions about the primary surgeon initiating a second surgery before the first surgery was fully completed. These reports led to a larger discussion of the reasons why surgeons may leave an operating room during the course of a surgery and the appropriate actions that need to be taken to inform the patient and ensure continued safe care.

In the guidance, ACS states:

The primary attending surgeon is personally responsible for the patient's welfare throughout the operation. In general, the patient's primary attending surgeon should be in the operating suite or be immediately available for the entire surgical procedure. There are instances consistent with good patient care that are valid exceptions. However, when the primary attending surgeon is not present or immediately available, another attending surgeon should be assigned as being immediately available.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) and Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) encourage all hospitals to undertake a review of their policies and procedures and make appropriate changes to make them consistent with the updated ACS Statements on Principles.

What You Can Do

The goal of hospitals and physicians is safe, high-quality and efficient patient care. In response to new technologies, increased demand for specialty surgery, emerging surgical techniques, and the growth and aging of the population, U.S. hospitals have

sought improved and more efficient means to meet the needs of their patients. The care provided patients is reviewed through hospital quality improvement and patient safety programs on an ongoing basis.

The AHA and AAMC believe that it would be beneficial for all hospitals to review the updated Statements on Principles to determine whether any changes to hospital policies, procedures and practices are warranted to make them consistent with the principles and, if so, implement such changes.

Many hospitals may find that the policies and procedures currently in place are consistent with the updated Statements on Principles. Other hospitals may need to review and revise their policies and procedures to address concurrent, overlapping and multidisciplinary operations and to ensure patients and their families are informed of the surgical plan for the operation, including the role of the primary surgeon.

The AHA and AAMC emphasize that no increased risks to patients have been linked to overlapping or concurrent surgeries. And potential risks may be controlled and mitigated by existing policies, procedures and practices. Nevertheless, we believe that hospitals should review their policies and procedures to ensure that they are consistent with the updated ACS Statements on Principles.

Please undertake the following steps:

- ✓ Share this advisory with your senior management, senior leader for quality, and chief medical and nursing leaders.
- ✓ Review the updated ACS Statements on Principles, evaluate whether modifications to your hospital policies and procedures are needed to make them consistent with the latest Principles, and make appropriate changes.
- ✓ Participate in an upcoming AHA and AAMC educational opportunity on concurrent, overlapping and multidisciplinary operations. This information will be announced separately.
- ✓ If your hospital has already modified its policies and procedures on concurrent, overlapping and multidisciplinary operations and you wish to be a mentor for other hospitals, contact us at the email addresses below.

Further Questions

Contact Nancy Foster, AHA vice president of quality and patient safety, at nfoster@aha.org, or Ivy Baer, AAMC senior director and regulatory counsel, at ibaer@aamc.org.