

Occupational Risks for Surgical Technologists

Surgical technologists face several occupational risks due to the nature of their work in the operating room. Key risks include:

1. **Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens:** Surgical technologists are at risk of exposure to blood, bodily fluids, and other infectious materials, which can lead to infections from viruses like HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. This risk is heightened through accidental needle sticks or contact with contaminated surgical instruments.
2. **Sharps-Related Injuries:** Handling sharp instruments like scalpels and needles poses a significant risk. Accidental cuts or punctures can expose technologists to infections or injuries.
3. **Radiation Exposure:** In procedures involving fluoroscopy or X-rays, surgical technologists may be exposed to radiation, leading to potential long-term health issues if proper protective measures, such as wearing lead aprons, are not taken.
4. **Musculoskeletal Injuries:** The physical demands of standing for long periods, moving heavy equipment, and assisting with patient positioning can lead to musculoskeletal injuries like strains and back pain.
5. **Latex Allergy:** Frequent exposure to latex gloves and products in the operating room can result in allergic reactions ranging from skin irritation to more severe responses like respiratory issues.
6. **Chemical Exposure:** Surgical technologists may be exposed to hazardous chemicals, including anesthetic gases, disinfectants, and sterilization agents, which can pose respiratory or skin risks.
7. **Psychological Stress:** The high-pressure environment of the operating room, dealing with life-or-death situations, and the need for constant focus can contribute to emotional and psychological stress over time.

In addition to these risks, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has established protections that are crucial in healthcare settings. OSHA's standards help safeguard both healthcare workers and patients by setting guidelines for handling hazardous materials, using personal protective equipment (PPE), and maintaining a safe work environment.

Accredited programs, such as the Surgical Technology program at Angelina College, educate students about the risks they may encounter in their profession and teach them the protocols necessary to foster a workplace culture that prioritizes safety and minimizes hazards. This ensures that students are well-prepared to face the occupational challenges of the field while prioritizing safety.