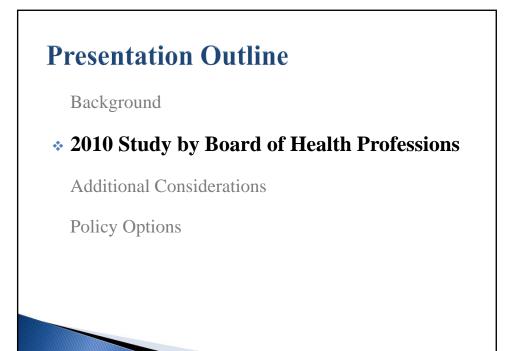


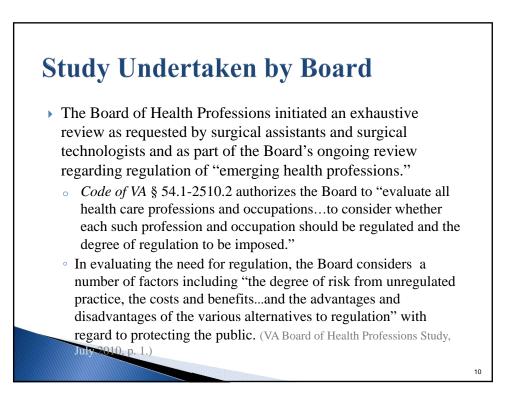
# **Increased Use of Unlicensed Personnel**

- A primary issue related to the lack of regulation of surgical assistants and surgical technologists is the increased use of such unlicensed personnel as "assistants-at-surgery."
  - An "assistant-at-surgery acts as the 'co-pilot' or 'second set of hands' for the surgeon. The assistant-at-surgery does not perform surgery, but performs complex surgical tasks including harvesting veins for bypass grafts, dissecting tissue, removing tissue, altering tissue, clamping and cauterizing vessels, subcutaneous sutures, suctioning, irrigating, sponging and implanting devices." (VA Board of Health Professions Study, July 2010, p. ii.)
  - While the assistant-at-surgery role is often performed by a surgeon, physician, physician assistant, or resident, non-physician practitioners and unlicensed persons may perform that role also.

# **Experienced Surgical Technologists Sometimes Act as Assistants**

- Surgical technologists typically perform a "scrub role":
  - Prior-to-surgery activities include preparing patients for surgery, observing patients' vital signs, and assembling and checking surgical equipment.
  - During-surgery activities include preparing and maintaining the sterile field; passing instruments, fluids and supplies to the surgeon; and operating lasers, robots, sterilizers, lights, suction apparatus, and diagnostic equipment.
- However, experienced surgical technologists sometimes perform some secondary roles associated with an assistant-atsurgery.





# **Board Findings on Degree of Risk**

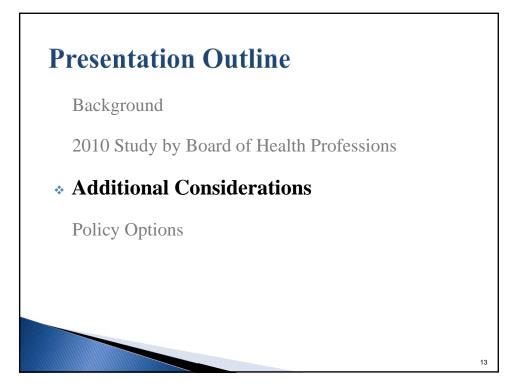
- "The unregulated practice of surgical assistants poses a high risk of harm to patients which is directly attributable to the nature of the practice.... Although surgical assistants practice with surgeons, the nature of their work requires independent judgment, knowledge and competence. Therefore licensure is the least restrictive means of protecting the public and ensuring the minimum qualifications of surgical assistants."
- "The unregulated practice of surgical technologists poses a moderate potential harm....attributable to the nature of certain advanced tasks, and the inherent hazards and patient vulnerability associated with surgery and infection....While much of the work...is supervised...the nature of the risks and tasks require independent competence and judgment" such that mandatory certification should be required for surgical technologists. (VA Board of Health Professions Study, July 2010, pp. iv-v.)

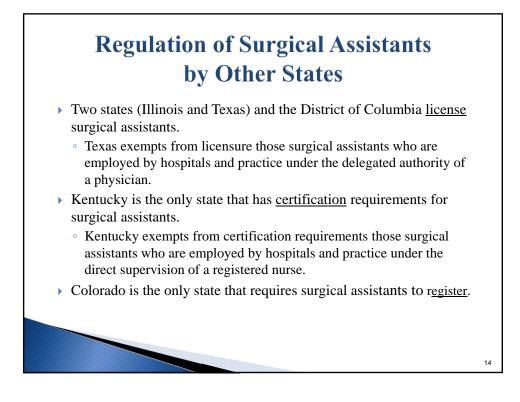
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# **Board Recommendations**

- The Board of Health Professions recommended, in part, that the Board of Medicine should:
  - "establish a license for surgical assistants."
  - "require mandatory certification for surgical technologists."
    - Mandatory certification requires employers and practitioners to ensure that practitioners have the credentials required by the Board of Medicine.
  - "identify training programs and military occupational specialties that impart the necessary skills, knowledge and competence and allow military-trained surgical technologists and surgical assistants to practice in Virginia."





# **Regulation of Surgical Technologists** by Other States

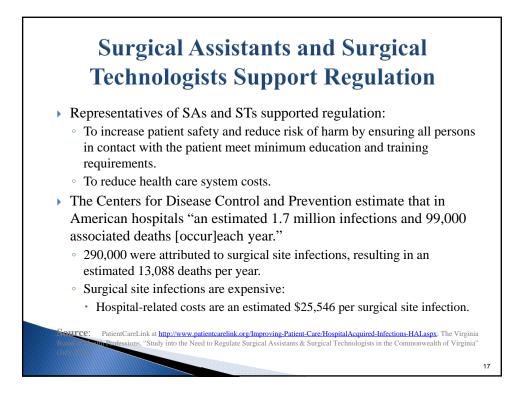
- Six states (Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) have <u>certification</u> requirements for surgical technologists.
- Colorado and Washington are the only states that require surgical technologists to register.

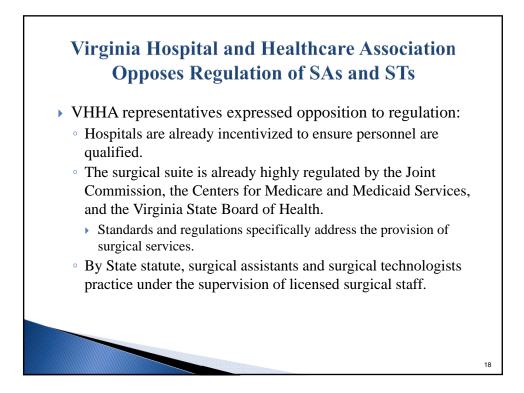
# Surgical Assistants and Surgical Technologists Support Regulation

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- Representatives of SAs and STs indicated that regulation of their professions would allow them to feel like a legitimate part of the surgical team and would foster collaboration.
- Furthermore, STs indicated certification would provide them a pathway to the middle class at a low cost and without requiring a four-year college degree.
  - The educational costs associated with certification are minimal.
  - Being certified can help in finding and securing employment and assist in career advancement in working to become a surgical assistant, or pursuing another health care occupation such as a physician assistant or nursing.





### Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association Opposes Regulation of STs and SAs

- Health care industry costs could increase with more regulation as it would decrease flexibility within the workforce and increase the burden on current staff to manage and ensure personnel meet the new credentialing requirements.
- No specific harm realized or history of identified problems has been linked to the need for more regulation.
- Any problems with unqualified persons are already handled through personnel channels and the availability of malpractice claims.

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