

A Trip Down the Perioperative Trail

A personal reflection by Tara Babin RN

May 2010

I can feel my heart beating, as I watch the circulating nurses preparing the patient for surgery. I look through my fogged mask and go over in my head what size of gloves to give to which doctor. I breathe quickly as the surgeon approaches. Oh no, as I go to give the surgeon's their gown's; I realize I forgot about the liners!

I have been an OR nurse for just over 2 years now, I have worked in two different Operating Room's within Alberta. A little while ago, I was thinking about how far I have come in the past two years. The tasks that I used to have to think about so much now come naturally. We have students that come through the OR, whether it's just for a day or as part of the perioperative program. It made me realize how easy it is to forget what it feels like on the first few days, when you scrub for a case, or when you are circulating and you are just not quite sure what is going to happen next.

I thought I would share a few moments from my first few months as a student, in hopes of reminding all of us what it really feels like to be not only the new person, but also the new person who is not sure how to do things.

I will never forget the first day I scrubbed for a day of general surgery cases. The first tricky part was gowning and gloving myself. Although I had practiced, I was sweating by the time I managed to get both pairs of gloves on, sure I may have had two fingers in the same hole, but hey I was still sterile. How about the times when I would be all scrubbed in and proud of myself standing at the scrub sink and then just as I was about to head into the room, I would bump my wrist on the tap and have to start the whole scrub all over again. By the time the set up was done (with assistance from another nurse scrubbed in of course) I was sweating even more. So much that now I couldn't see anything out of my visor because it was so fogged up and dripping on the inside of the mask. Now to pass instruments, I am sure I passed snaps upside down for at least a week, before I really got the hang of it. I also wondered where to put my hands when they didn't need to be anywhere else. One thing I also struggled with was managing to load laparoscopic clip appliers without hitting my mask with the instrument. I can still hear my preceptor saying "you are getting really close to your mask, next time you're going to hit it!" and sure enough she was right. The instrument was contaminated, I had passed off, I was feeling bad about the situation and I was still standing there sweating bullets.

So, after the scrub roll became a little more familiar, it was time to move onto the circulating role. Talking to the patient preoperatively was always a little nerve racking. I would go through my step-by-step process and try to get all of the important information from the patient. I would manage to drive the stretcher successfully into the room (without running into people or equipment in the way), and then when asked by my preceptor what time the patient left holding, I would have no idea. I was too worried about every other thing to remember the time we left. The worst was when I would run into the sterile core, with a panicked look on my face and ask for help from anybody there to help me find an item that the surgeon needed right away. If only I could remember the name of that item, or the number of the suture by the time I got into the core. I also remember crawling under the drapes to put a cautery pad on after I had forgotten (which by the way still happens occasionally). I also don't know how many times I would forget to connect the camera for laparoscopic cases! The last part of being a circulating nurse that challenged me was bringing the stretcher to recovery with the anaesthesiologist.

They always wanted to go so fast, my legs had trouble keeping up and then to steer, hit buttons to open doors and not get squished was a complicated task all on it's own.

Well, eventually through practice, the help of a great preceptor, some educators and a good friend to share the funny stories with these tasks that I struggled with all became a little easier, and, I made it through.

I hope this has helped us all remember what it felt like to be a struggling student. I now try to make a point to be kind and helpful to those who come through the OR. A little patience and understanding goes a long way for the students, especially on our very busy days. I'm sure we can all remember what it was like to be the new person. I have to say, I am so pleased with my choice to become a perioperative nurse. We share a lot of laughs; good times, and get to work in an area where there is always something new to learn and someone to share it with. I now breathe a little easier as I prepare to give the surgeon their gown!