

31 July 2017

An Open Letter to All Employers of Registered Anaesthetic Technicians: Working Across Two Theatres

The Medical Sciences Council (the Council) is appointed by the Minister of Health to regulate the practice of Anaesthetic Technicians to ensure protection of the health and safety of the New Zealand public under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

It has come to the Council's attention that Anaesthetic Technicians in some hospitals are being rostered to work across two theatres providing assistance to the Anaesthetist.

Numerous queries have been received from Anaesthetic Technicians who are concerned about the impact this practice has in respect of safe practice and the Council would like to take this opportunity to remind employers of the parameters of the Anaesthetic Technician scope of practice, and their responsibilities as registered health practitioners.

All registered Anaesthetic Technicians are expected to practice in accordance with the Council's *Competencies for Anaesthetic Technicians (2011)*, in particular

1.6 Manages workload and resources effectively and efficiently including:

- Prioritising workload
- Responding to urgent requests
- Timely completion of tasks

In addition it is important to note that the competencies align with the PS08 Statement on the Assistant for the Anaesthetist promulgated by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) which includes recommendations on the level of staffing:

4.1 The presence of a trained assistant for the anaesthetist is essential:

4.1.1 *during preparation for and induction of anaesthesia the assistant must remain under the immediate direction of the anaesthetist until instructed that this level of assistance is no longer required.*

4.1.2 *during maintenance of anaesthesia an assistant must be immediately available*

4.1.3 *at the conclusion of anaesthesia*

The Council also expects the employers of Anaesthetic Technicians to comply with the Anaesthetic Technicians professional body (NZ Anaesthetic Technicians Society) guidelines statement that

“NZATS promotes the quality and safety of patient care therefore supporting a 1:1 ratio of anaesthesia assistance for every case where anaesthesia is administered”.

The Council concurs that compliance with the ANZCA and NZATS guidelines is essential to ensure safe practice for the provision of anaesthesia. This includes an Anaesthetic Technician being present for the induction of anaesthesia (or establishment of regional block), as well as being immediately available during maintenance, and at the conclusion of anaesthesia.

The Council expects that both the employer and Anaesthetic Technicians themselves will take responsibility for ensuring their practice meets the above safety requirements and in particular where ever possible a one to one ratio of Anaesthetic Technicians to functioning operating rooms should be maintained.

However, the Council accepts that in a genuine life or limb emergency then the principles out lined above may need to be over ridden until circumstances again allow a 1:1 ratio of technicians to operating rooms.

The Council thanks you for this opportunity to raise this issue and trusts that decisions to roster Anaesthetic Technicians will be done through a collegial approach where patient health and safety is paramount.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Doyle', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mary Doyle
CEO/Registrar
Medical Sciences Council