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# Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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## Overview

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**Purpose** To establish the responsibilities and the scope of practice of New Zealand Registered Sterilization Technicians.

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# Scope of Practice – Sterilization Technicians

## Introduction

**Purpose** To establish the responsibilities and the scope of practice of New Zealand Registered Sterilization Technicians.

**Scope** Applies to all New Zealand Trainee and Registered Sterile Service Technicians

**Associated documents** The table below identifies associated documents.

Type	Title/Description
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003</li><li>• ACC Legislation</li><li>• Privacy Act</li><li>• The New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000 (NZPHD Act)</li></ul>
Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AS/NZS 4187:2003 – Cleaning, disinfecting and sterilizing reusable medical and surgical instruments and equipment, and maintenance of associated environments in health care facilities.</li><li>• AS/NZS 4815: (2006) Office based health care facilities – Reprocessing of reusable medical and surgical instruments and equipment, and maintenance of the associated environment</li><li>• ISO 13485: 2003. Medical devices – Quality management systems – Requirements for regulatory purposes</li><li>• NZS HB 8149:2001 Microbiological Surveillance of Flexible Hollow Endoscopes</li><li>• NZS 8142:200 Infection Control</li><li>• NZS 8184:2001 – Health and Disability Sector Standards</li></ul>
New Zealand Sterile Services Association [NZSSA]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NZSSA Guidelines: Code of Conduct for Sterilizing Staff</li><li>• NZSSA Guideline: Decontamination, Disinfection and Sterilization Competencies</li><li>• NZSSA Guidelines: Orientation of Sterilization Technicians (or correct title)</li><li>• NZSSA Guideline: Registration Criteria</li></ul>

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Introduction, Continued

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The provision of effectively reprocessed reusable medical devices which are fit and safe to use for patient care involves a series of complex interrelated processes, requiring the Sterilization Technician to acquire and demonstrate competence across a broad range of specialist areas.

Registered Sterilization Technicians must utilize underpinning theoretical knowledge, technical judgement and specialist skills whilst demonstrating high standards of competence in the following key activities in the reprocessing of reusable medical devices:

- Initial treatment of soiled reusable medical devices upon receipt into the Sterile Services Department
- Sorting of reusable medical devices according to corresponding & relevant cleaning methods
- Cleaning, using one or more combinations of manual and automated cleaning processes
- Inspection and assembly of reusable medical devices
- Comprehensive understanding and identification of instrumentation relevant to the health care facility they are employed with
- Packaging of reusable medical devices using materials compatible with the selected sterilization process if applicable
- Applying the appropriate method of sterilization or disinfection as required
- Loading the steriliser correctly to facilitate achievement of sterilization
- Correctly operate disinfection equipment or sterilisers in order to deliver the specified disinfection / sterilization process, including performance of specified periodic testing and checking procedures
- Cooling and/or aeration of reusable medical devices post sterilization if applicable
- Storage, handling and transportation of sterile items is carried out in a manner that sustains the integrity of the packaging and therefore the sterility of the item
- Ensuring traceability of reusable medical devices occurs in accordance with organisational requirements

Sterilization Technicians must operate a broad range of equipment, identify many hundreds of different types of surgical instruments, dismantle and reassemble them if indicated and be aware of compatible cleaning, disinfection and sterilization methods suitable for these medical devices and therefore must maintain an extensive and current knowledge

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Introduction, Continued

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on surgical instruments, reprocessing equipment, applicable standards, guidelines and procedural changes occurring within Sterile Service Department itself.

Sterilization Technicians work as an integral part of the healthcare team in order to assist in ensuring the provision of safe and effectively reprocessed reusable medical devices for patients undergoing surgery or other invasive interventional procedures. Sterilization Technicians are committed to the process of continual improvement and providing support and education to their junior colleagues and other staff as required.

Sterilization Technicians work within the limitations of their Scope of Practice, adhere to the Code of Conduct and comply with the organisational policies and procedures of their employers.

Sterilization Technicians meet the objectives set out by the health care facility they are employed by.

Sterilization Technicians are proactive in developing their knowledge and understanding of sterilization technologies, techniques and theory to ensure that their practices are relevant and safe.

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### Competencies

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The NZSSA is committed to minimizing the risk of transmission of infections in health care settings and ensuring optimum patient outcomes by ensuring reprocessing of instruments and equipment used in the delivery of health services is performed correctly.

The NZSSA believes that consistency of practice throughout New Zealand is essential to maintain standards and is an integral component of their infection control strategy. Through the Decontamination, Disinfection and Sterilization Competencies, the NZSSA outlines the specifications of knowledge and skill required by Sterilization Technicians involved in the reprocessing of instruments and equipment.

The NZSSA Guideline: Decontamination, Disinfection and Sterilization Competencies provides a method by which assessment of Sterilization Technicians throughout New Zealand can be completed on an equitable and measurable foundation. The full document can be accessed via this link [www.nzssa.org.nz/competencies](http://www.nzssa.org.nz/competencies)

The Competencies within this document encompass the following key skill areas:

- Health & Safety
- Communication and effective work practices
- Organize personal work priorities and development
- Collect and transport used items
- Clean and dry used items
- Prepare and pack items for sterilization
- Comply with infection control policies and procedures
- Sterilization
- Disinfection
- Control and transport sterile stock
- Monitor a safe workplace
- Support continuous improvement systems and processes
- Commission equipment and validate processes
- Manage and maintain reprocessing services, equipment and facilities
- Manage effective and relevant sterilization and disinfection processes

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Competencies, Continued

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- Participate in work teams
- Contribute to effective workplace relationships

Through these Decontamination, Disinfection and Sterilization Competencies, the NZSAA provides a structure and facilitates a consistent approach for increasing the effectiveness and quality of reprocessing of instruments and equipment in New Zealand.

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Expectations & Accountability

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**Expectations** Sterilization Technicians are expected to:

- Maintain the necessary qualifications and associated requirements for currency of registration
- Practice within the limitations of the applicable Standards, NZSSA Guidelines and Competencies
- Comply with the NZSSA Code of Conduct
- Act ethically
- Not cause harm to patients, colleagues and other customers
- Respect the rights, cultural background and privacy of colleagues and customers
- Comply with the protocols of the Sterile Services Department; and the employer
- Carry out duties in a competent and efficient manner,
- Participate in educational opportunities that arise
- Operate equipment and machinery within the Sterile Services Department in a safe and professional manner
- Work as a team member, assisting colleagues and customers in an appropriate and professional manner
- Work to maintain public trust and confidence
- Work collaboratively with multidisciplinary colleagues
- Be a member of the NZSSA

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**Accountability** Sterilization Technicians, irrespective of their recognised level of practice are to:

- Be responsible and accountable to more senior qualified Sterilization Technicians / Team Leader / Supervisor / Manager as appropriate to the organisational structure
- Only undertake activities in which they are competent and authorised to do so as per their recognised level of practice
- Acknowledge any limitations in personal knowledge or competence and seek assistance
- Monitor the practice of peers and trainees and delegate appropriately
- Ensure that no action or omission will be detrimental to patients, colleagues or other members of the healthcare team

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Expectations & Accountability, Continued

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**Accountability**  
*continued*

- Uphold the safety and rights of their colleagues and patients
  - Seek to improve their level of knowledge, skills and standards of practice wherever practicable and assist other colleagues to extend their knowledge and competence
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### Level of Practice

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Sterilization Technicians can be classified using a three level structure. These levels are:

- Trainee Sterilization Technician [TST]
- Registered Sterilization Technician [RST]
- Senior Registered Sterilization Technician [SRST]

Sterilization Technicians working within each classification level are expected to comply with all of the Expectations and Accountabilities as described within the Scope of Practice.

However, it is recognised that the level of supervision required and levels of competence in aspects of advanced practices within the role of a Sterilization Technician will vary according to an individual's classification and the number of years of practice and experience they have. This variation is a naturally occurring event, linked to an individual's exposure to different workplaces and experiences within their working environments. Nonetheless, demonstration of achievement of competence in the basic areas of practice is mandatory before an individual can be considered for reclassification at another level.

Therefore the minimum requirements to be classified within each category of Sterilization Technician are as follows.

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#### **Trainee Sterilization Technician**

A Trainee Sterilization Technician is a person currently undertaking the Sterilizing Technology course; or a person that after initial on-the-job training and without being enrolled in the Sterilizing Technology Certificate, works under supervision of a Registered Sterilization Technician within a Sterile Services Department until evidence of competence has been demonstrated.

Trainee Sterilization Technicians understand the significance of commitment to quality improvement and continuing education.

The Trainee Sterilization Technician is expected to work within the limitation of the Scope of Practice.

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### Level of Practice, Continued

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#### **Trainee Sterilization Technician** *continued*

In addition to meeting the basic competency requirements in terms of Occupational Safety and Health, Infection Control, Communication and Effective Work Practices, after appropriate training, Trainee Sterilization Technicians may work without direct supervision in the following technical areas once documented evidence of competence has been achieved:

- Soiled instrument collection – Competency 4: Collect and Transport Used Items
- Basic decontamination duties – Competency 5: Clean and Dry Used Items
- General packaging duties – Competency 6: Prepare and Pack Items
- Dispatch duties - Competency 10: Control and Transport Sterile Stock

Trainee Sterilization Technicians may only undertake tasks outside of their recognised areas of competence under the direct supervision of a Registered Sterilization Technician.

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#### **Registered Sterilization Technician**

A Registered Sterile Service Technicians is a person holding the STC (Sterilizing Technology Certificate), has demonstrated competence in all the NZSSA Competencies and is registered on the NZSSA ‘roll of registered technicians’.

An alternative pathway exists for a person with significant previous experience, significant technical skills and current employment in the role of Sterilization Technician to apply for registration on the NZSSA ‘roll of registered technicians’ through demonstrating evidence of competence in all the NZSSA Competencies.

Registered Sterilization Technicians understands the significance of and demonstrates in their daily practice their commitment to quality improvement and continuing education.

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## Scope of Practice – *Sterilization Technicians*

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### Level of Practice, Continued

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#### **Senior Sterilization Technician**

A Senior Sterilization Technician is a person holding the STC (Sterilizing Technology Certificate), with at least 5 years of experience, has demonstrated competence in all the NZSSA Competencies and is registered on the NZSSA 'roll of registered technicians'.

In addition to demonstrating competence in the area of “advanced sterilization practice”, the Senior Sterilization Technician shall have designated supervisory duties, be responsible for performing staff Performance Appraisal, and shall demonstrate competence in coordinating the reprocessing and distribution of reusable medical/surgical devices and consumable products within their control.

A Senior Sterilization Technician understands the significance of and demonstrates in their daily practice their commitment to quality improvement and continuing education.

A Senior Sterilization Technician has a national and or international focus within the sterilization field.

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