
Fundamentals of Surgery for Physician Assistants

Sam Atallah • Jelena Dragoljevic
Editors

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Foreword



As a brand new second year PA Student, I clasped my freshly scrubbed hands together at the center of my chest sweating underneath my gown and gloves. My breath fogged up my face shield as I had not yet mastered the art of crimping my mask over my nose. My heart raced with excitement and an equal level of nervousness as I was in the operating room for the first time on my colorectal surgery rotation with Dr. Atallah. This was the moment I had been waiting for.

This was the moment of truth.

I would soon find out if I could handle the guts and glory of an exploratory laparotomy. The circulator pulled up a step, and I stepped up into my greatness as I stood shoulder to shoulder with surgeons, fellows, residents, and PA students around the patient. I intently listened to every detail during the timeout and attempted to calm my nervous system by deepening my breath. The incision was made and the smoke from electrocautery started to make me feel sick. I could feel the gaze of the surgeons and surgical technicians on me as I focused on the acute abdomen before me.

At that very moment I almost called it quits. Dr. Atallah asked me to give him my hands. He placed them inside of the abdomen and allowed me to run the bowel. He showed me what was normal and what was abnormal. He pointed out the multiple abscesses and how these distorted the once healthy anatomy.

In that very moment my entire life changed.

My love for surgery was born and the unshakable desires to learn, best serve our patients, and one day teach the medical community simultaneously were created.

This textbook will serve as a valuable resource throughout your career as a surgical PA. Give yourself permission to dive deep into studying the details of the anatomy illustrations. Immerse yourself in developing the skill set of fine-tuning your history and physical exam through the examples provided over these pages. But most importantly apply what you learned here within these chapters to the life-saving real experiences you will practice on the floor, in the clinic, and in the OR.

What you bring to the table as a surgical PA influences the entire surgical team. The role of the surgical PA has evolved into a vital cog in the wheel of modern surgical care, bridging the gap between patients, surgeons, and the healthcare team.

Often, surgical PAs are known as the common provider to the patient. From their first consultation, to rolling back to the OR to post-op follow-up evaluations, surgical PAs create continuity of care that alleviates the anxiety of the perioperative experience. As medicine continues to advance, so too must the knowledge and skills of those who assist in surgical procedures, manage perioperative care, and contribute to positive patient outcomes. Consider this textbook as your comprehensive resource, equipping you with the essential clinical, technical, and decision-making expertise necessary to excel in this dynamic field.

Written by experienced surgical professionals, this text covers fundamental principles as well as advanced concepts, ensuring that readers—from students to seasoned practitioners—can refine their proficiency in surgical techniques, patient management, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Each chapter is designed to provide not only foundational knowledge but also real-world application, preparing surgical PAs for the complexities of modern surgical practice while maintaining their own mental well-being.

As the demand for skilled surgical PAs grows, so does the need for high-quality educational materials tailored to this profession. Dr. Atallah genuinely prepared me well for my entrance into the surgical PA profession as my first, and honestly most influential preceptor. I know his meticulous involvement in this publication will prepare you equally as well. This textbook stands as a testament to the dedication and expertise of those who have contributed to its creation, offering a valuable guide for anyone pursuing excellence in surgical patient care.

It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce this resource. Confident that it will serve as an indispensable tool for surgical PAs committed to enhancing their knowledge, skills, and impact within the surgical team.

No matter what, never give up on being the best surgical PA you can be. The world needs your intelligent and wholehearted care.

President of The American Association of Surgical PAs

Michelle Dellene
Lombard, IL USA

Preface

There has been tremendous growth in the number of PAs in the healthcare, with more than 125,000 active PAs in the United States as of 2021. This has quadrupled since 1980. In addition, there are currently 11,000 PAs in training in the United States in 277 accredited programs.

With such considerable growth, projected to continue well into the future, it is important to tailor and curate information *for the PA*. Approximately 25% of PAs pursue a surgical specialty upon graduation, so it's imperative to have educational content geared toward the physician assistant, and other advanced practice providers (APPs) as well.

The growth in this provider market has outpaced our ability to provide appropriate didactic content, including textbooks that are made to educate PAs commensurate with *their* level of training and background. That has been the impetus behind *Fundamentals of Surgery for Physician Assistants*.

Fifty years ago, outside of the classroom, education was found in books and only books. Today, education has been highly enriched by electronic media, generative AI (Chat GPT, Open Evidence), video education, and a multitude of student-friendly aides. While all of this has improved one's ability to learn, it doesn't replace the value of books—which help teach principles and—when done properly—direct students and practicing PAs to *what's important*. While generative AI can be very useful and has proven itself increasingly accurate, student learners need *direction* and *guidance*. In other words, AI and new modes of education enhance formal education and texts, but don't replace them. For this reason, even 50 years from now, books will *still* have a role in education and PA training!

Fundamentals of Surgery for Physician Assistants carries several advantages. First, it is written with expert perspectives from 42 institutions, and 70 contributing authors, many of whom are PAs/APPs themselves... an aspect that ensures the APP's *point of view* is taken into consideration. Second, as editors, our main objective was to assure that the content was expressed in a manner suitable for the PA level of training, and that the content covers the critical information needed to be learned—especially for PAs during their clinical year who are preparing for the surgery End of Rotation (EOR) exam and, afterwards, for the PANCE. Finally, it was important to present this material in a way that could be more easily grasped. To this end, hundreds of tables, figures, and clinical images have been used throughout.

Although *Fundamentals of Surgery for Physician Assistants* was designed specifically with the PA in mind, there is obviously crossover information suitable for all APPs. Indeed, several of the contributing authors are PAs and NPs, which strengthens this resource, and broadens its applicability. Ultimately, we hope that this becomes a valuable learning aide for all student learners and that it becomes integral to formal education programs.

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Whether large or small, your contributions helped to make this book a better product!

Sam Atallah
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Jelena Dragoljevic, PA-C earned her Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences from the University of Central Florida and her Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from Nova Southeastern University in Orlando. She has experience in both urology and endocrinology. Her contributions to the text aim to reinforce the clinical relevance of the material for PA students and practicing PAs.

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