



EXETER

SURGICAL SOCIETY

Medical Student Placements in Surgical Theatres; Tips and Advice from EXESS

Time spent in surgical theatres is an essential part of your surgical blocks in clinical years. Watching surgeries is a great opportunity to see clinically relevant anatomy, surgical skills in practise and gives you a sneak peek into a surgeon's varied workload. Even if you aren't keen on surgery as a career, surgical theatres are a great place to pick up learning gems from the surgeons and theatre staff.

In order to help you get the most out of your time in theatres, this document will give you a few hints on how to conduct yourself and how to prepare for a session in theatres.

Before Surgery

- Knowing what surgery you're going into is always a good start. Usually by 5PM the day before, reception in theatres will have a list of the surgeries for the next day. Check with reception then to see what surgeries are on. Doing some general reading on that surgery (relevant anatomy, alternatives and reasons for surgery etc.) will make you feel less nervous about the next day and make the surgery more interesting and relevant to your learning.
- Usually, time in theatres is scheduled in your time table, so surgeons are usually expecting you. However, if you meet the surgeon you're with the next day, just check that they're happy for you to attend their list.

Day of Surgery

- Especially if it's a morning surgery; have a good breakfast beforehand!
- Arrive early on the day. If you are about to attend a full day list, head over to Knapp ward (or the relevant pre-op ward for your department) at 8AM. The surgeons and anaesthetists may already be there, seeing their patients before starting surgery. Unless instructed otherwise, take this opportunity to take to the patients whose surgeries you'll be watching. Do a history and examination where relevant and ask the patient for their permission to see their surgery. If your department's SHO is on Knapp, ask them if there are any bloods for you to take.
- Once you've talked to some patients, head over to theatres and sign in at reception. Then, change into surgical scrubs and shoes. Try not to store any of your valuables in the locker rooms.
- Before heading into your theatre, make sure you aren't wearing any jewellery, that you're wearing a pink scrub hat and that your ID badge is visible somewhere on your scrubs. If you want, you can bring in a pen and notebook and maybe a small textbook. Just don't bring anything too bulky, as this just ends up as clutter in the operating room.



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- Enter your theatre through the scrubbing room, the clinical waste room or the anaesthetics room. Do not enter through the main doors of the theatre. Once inside, introduce yourself to the scrub nurse or the ODP in charge and the surgeon (if they are there already). You will most likely be asked to write your name on the whiteboard.
- While the patient is being prepped in the anaesthetics room, do not go in, unless you've asked the patient and anaesthetist for permission to be in there with them.

During Surgery

- Before the surgery begins, you might be given the opportunity to scrub in. This is a great chance to see the surgery close up. Make sure you read up on the clinical skills resources on how to scrub before your surgery placement. But if you don't feel confident in your scrubbing skills, don't worry! Ask one of the ODPs for help. The ODPs are generally all very approachable and keen to teach you how to properly scrub in.
- While the surgery is being set up, help out any way you can; help surgeons and scrub nurses tie their gowns, help move patients from their beds to the operating table, or just pay attention and make sure you don't get in anyone's way. It also doesn't hurt to ask an ODP if they would like any help before the patient comes into the room.
- During the surgery, make sure you don't touch anything covered in sterile sheets or anyone wearing sterile gowns. If you're not sure, just ask!
- Between surgeries, unless you've been asked to go somewhere else, make sure you take a break. You may be standing for hours on end in theatres, so a chance to sit for a few minutes should always be taken! Head over to the staff room for some drinks.
- Some surgeons will be very keen to engage you while they're working. They might ask you questions and give you opportunities to see things or ask your own questions. Take all these opportunities- show that you're interested in learning. Of course, some surgeons will prefer focusing on their work, and might not give you as much attention. If this is the case, ask the anaesthetist if they'd be willing to teach you a bit about their work or talk you through any other aspects of working in theatres.

After Surgery

- You are not always expected to stay for all the surgeries. If it is time for you to go, try to catch the surgeon at a convenient time and thank them. If this is not possible, let someone else on the team know you are leaving.
- After changing, remember to sign out at reception.



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These are just a few tips on how to get the most out of your surgery weeks. The most important thing to remember is to show enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. The first few times in theatre can be daunting, but by getting involved and becoming part of the team, you will quickly see that you are often welcome in theatres and surrounded by people willing to teach you.

Enjoy your surgery blocks!

Exeter Surgical Society

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