

What is a surgical resident?

For the patient: A guide to surgical training and the professionals who will take care of you

Attending

The attending surgeon has finished all training and is fully qualified in surgery. The attending is in charge of your surgical care and supervises the team that takes care of you. This team includes residents, medical students, and other health professionals. The attending is in charge of training the residents, and of making sure that graduating residents are fully prepared to perform surgery on their own. While the residents and medical students may rotate on and off the team, an attending surgeon will always be responsible for managing your care.

Chief Resident

Chief residents are in their final year of residency training. Chief residents may be just months away from being in practice on their own. They will have participated in many hundreds of operations by the time they finish residency. Because of their experience and time in training, chief residents lead the team of residents and make many decisions.

Surgical Training: The Team

Over the course of your surgical experience, a team of many individuals will be contributing to your care.

Trainees—medical students and residents—may be part of that team. We want you and your family to understand who is helping with your surgical care and the role each person plays.

Resident

Residents are doctors who have completed medical school. Residents are training in a surgical specialty. Surgical residency lasts at least five years and sometimes longer. Residents in their first year of training are called interns. Surgical residents care for patients under the guidance of an attending surgeon. Residents are always supervised and are allowed to do more as they gain experience through training.

Medical Student

Medical students have completed a four-year college degree and are enrolled in medical school, which lasts four years. In medical school, students learn about medicine and surgery and help care for patients. They interview and examine patients and discuss their findings with more senior physicians. Students will go into the operating room to learn from the surgical team. Students do not make decisions, perform surgery, or sign orders.



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Residents will help care for you

A surgical resident may take your history, perform your physical exam, and oversee the tests you need to prepare for your operation. A resident may be the first one called to see you if the attending surgeon isn't in the hospital, such as at night or on weekends. Residents improve their skills and gain experience with each year they train. The attending in charge will decide which part of your care each resident can provide based on his or her training. Again, the attending surgeon is ultimately in charge of your care.

Residents will be involved in your operation

The attending surgeon knows the skills and training of each resident. He or she will decide which part of your operation the resident can do or help with. Residents are always supervised while doing a procedure. Patient safety is always the number one priority. You should know that residents typically practice surgical skills in a simulation lab many times before performing them on a person. If you have any questions or concerns about a resident assisting in your care, talk with your attending surgeon.

Residents participating in your care will benefit you

As a patient, you benefit from trainees assisting in your care. Because there is a whole team of physicians and students reviewing your case, you get very thorough attention. Also, as part of their education, medical students and residents will often look up your particular problem in the medical literature. They can answer many questions that you may have about your condition.

If you would like to know more about the benefits residents can provide to your care, please visit:

facs.org/patients/SurgicalResident

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Thank You

You, the patient, have a very important role to play in surgical education.

The experience gained by the future physicians and surgeons taking care of you guarantees that you have a direct impact on today's medical care as well as the future of medicine.

The goal is the same—safe surgical care—today and tomorrow.



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