Surgical conscience:

**Definition:** professional behavior that demonstrates a clear understanding and application of aseptic technique **AND** the legal, ethical and moral responsibilities to the patient and team members for which each practitioner is accountable

It is about placing the well-being of the patient and others above everything else

It is doing the right thing in the right way every time, even when no one is watching

It is about **speaking out** when you know that something is not right or something is occurring which places the patient, other staff or yourself at risk

**It is not about loyalty to coworkers and friends**

Surgical conscience consists of the following:

- Ethical behavior
- Having a good moral compass
  - Using your values and ethics to make the choice between what is right and what is wrong
- Using sound judgment
  - Making the best decision that you can under the circumstances
  - Putting the well-being of the patient and team members first
- Honesty
- Being trustworthy
- Taking professional responsibility and accountability for your actions and practice
  - Understanding the duty that you have to the patient, to protect them from harm and help them to have the safest surgical experience possible
- Speaking up
  - Do not be intimidated by others
  - If something is not right, then say something

It is a concept that can be applies to any practice situation

**You express your surgical conscience through your practice decisions; you choose how you will practice in the perioperative setting**

It is the responsibility of everyone on the surgical team (collective surgical conscience):
• The team functions in a complex and every changing environment
• Promoting surgical conscience can lead to some challenging situations; stand your ground
• Decisions made will impact the quality of care provided and the patient’s outcome

Acting on your surgical conscience involves knowledge, intelligence, self-awareness and courage to do the right thing

Barriers:

• Communication issues
• External forces: financial constraints, productivity, staffing
• Punitive environment, fear of retaliation
• Misguided loyalty to friends and coworkers
• Lateral violence: bullying and intimidation, exclusion from the group, belittling behaviors, negative or hostile work environment
• Acceptance of deviation from best practices

What does surgical conscience look like in the real world?

• Universal protocol
  o Patient identification
  o Prevention of wrong patient, wrong procedure and wrong site surgery
  o Informed consent - make sure that the patient understands their procedure
• Speaking up and stopping the process when you recognize that something is wrong
• Improper counts; not following the best practices
• Medication administration: confirming allergies, the many ‘rights’ of medication administration
• Identifying and correcting breaks in sterile technique
• Specimen handling: correctly identifying and labeling specimens; ensuring that they are properly handled
• Positioning; preventing potential injuries related to positioning