

Perceptions of the perioperative team regarding the use of the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist

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Abstract

Background

The WHO Surgical Safety Checklist (WHO Checklist) fosters communication and teamwork between the perioperative team and perceptions influence its acceptance and use. This study explores the perceptions of the perioperative team to the WHO Checklist in operating theatres at the University of the Witwatersrand affiliated hospitals.

Methods

A qualitative, contextual, exploratory research design was employed. Purposive sampling was used to invite theatre nurses, anaesthetists and surgeons to participate. Focus group interviews were held for each group. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Results

Ten nurses, 6 anaesthetists and 4 surgeons participated in the focus group interviews. Four themes relating to patient safety were identified namely, the prevalence of power struggles in theatre, a breakdown in communication, a culture of silence and the inadequate and siloed training. The perceptions of the perioperative teams interviewed describe a daily flight plagued by turbulence that may result in serious adverse events.

Conclusion

In a complex system such as a hospital theatre environment, the introduction of a simple tool such as the WHO Checklist has a limited impact on patient safety if the underlying supportive network is not intact. This study demonstrates the importance of interpersonal relationships, changing teams and lack of integration of teams, processes and training, on the use of the WHO Checklist as a safety tool in a South African hospital setting. A prevailing culture of safety is a prerequisite for successful implementation and use of the WHO Checklist.