

# Coaching to Improve the Quality of Communication During Briefings and Debriefings



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## ABSTRACT

Communication breakdowns have been identified as a root cause of many medical errors. Sentinel events occurring in surgery comprise a significant number of these events. Despite the addition of briefings and debriefings in the OR and the introduction of crew resource management principles, communication problems continue to occur in the surgical setting. The purpose of this research was to evaluate coaching as an intervention to improve the quality of OR briefings and debriefings. A retired orthopedic surgeon conducted coaching that included all members of the perioperative team. The quality of both briefings and debriefings significantly improved after the coaching intervention. Analysis of the results of this study suggests that coaching should be considered as an intervention to improve communication during surgical procedures, especially during briefings and debriefings. *AORN J* 100 (October 2014) 358-368. © AORN, Inc, 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2014.03.012>

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Communication among members of health care teams has become a focus for many institutions, in part because breakdowns in communication have been identified as a root cause of many medical errors.<sup>1-4</sup> Surgical sentinel events comprise a significant number of these events and include anesthesia-related events; wrong-patient, wrong-site, and wrong-procedure events; unintended retained foreign body events; operative and postoperative complications; medication errors; and fires.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, improving the quality of communication that occurs in the OR may decrease the number of errors and make the surgical environment safer for patients. Crew resource management

(CRM) training has been used to improve teamwork and communication in the perioperative setting.<sup>6,7</sup> Crew resource management has significantly improved the teamwork, communication, and safety in aviation, and has more recently been applied to health care.<sup>8</sup> In fact, CRM principles have been applied in the OR setting because each team member's communication needs to be effective to increase teamwork and safety in the OR.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this research was to determine whether coaching was an effective intervention in improving communication in the OR. The specific

aim of this research was to improve the quantity and quality of OR briefings and debriefings by using a modified World Health Organization surgical safety checklist<sup>9</sup> and to increase the use of CRM principles within the OR through a coaching intervention.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Are more briefings and debriefings completed after coaching sessions?
- Is there a difference in the quality of briefings and debriefings after coaching sessions?

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE TO NURSING

Perioperative nurses coordinate multiple aspects of care in an OR. Communication, teamwork, and collaboration among multiple disciplines within an OR are paramount to achieving the desired outcomes for the patient's surgery. Lack of teamwork, poor communication, and the traditional hierarchical structure within health care can contribute to near misses and errors. For example, if surgical team members see the surgeon as the expert leader, it may be difficult for them to question the surgeon's decisions. Even though checklists are often used to help structure briefing and debriefing content, simple adherence to a checklist does not ensure that quality communication actually occurs during team interaction periods. At times, a team member may go through the motions of reading the checklist while other team members are not engaged and are busy with other tasks. Also, the team might not value the use of the checklist and simply see it as a task to get done, so they rush through it without paying attention. Improving the quality of briefings and debriefings provides for more thorough exchange of information concerning the patient's condition, improved preparation for the surgical procedure, and identification of potential concerns, thus providing improved team functioning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication limitations in health care frequently have been indicated as the single most important cause of adverse events within the industry.<sup>10,11</sup> In a recent systematic review of the literature, Lawton et al<sup>12</sup> identified a list of factors (eg, design of equipment and supplies, policies, lines of responsibility, staff workloads, safety cultures, team factors) contributing to patient safety incidents in a hospital setting and identified communication failures as one of the factors contributing to errors and near misses.

Various CRM interventions have been implemented within health care, and research has been conducted to assess the implications that such interventions may have. For example, a large community hospital system implemented an evaluation of OR team training by using a CRM program called TeamSTEPPS® and provided this training to all current staff members and incoming hospital employees, including nonclinical personnel.<sup>13</sup> Trainee reactions; learning; behaviors in the OR; and proxy outcome measures, such as the Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture and OR Management Attitudes Questionnaire, were collected. All the levels of evaluation showed positive results. For example, perceptions by team members regarding the culture of safety increased, as did overall individual attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

Although studies such as these<sup>10-13</sup> are extremely valuable because they demonstrate the positive effects that CRM principles can have in health care, the majority do not specifically address the effect that CRM can have on communication exchanges within the OR. In contrast, there are several examples of research that have considered such a relationship. For example, Böhmer et al<sup>14</sup> introduced a surgical checklist and measured communication by using a survey that assessed staff member perception of communication. Mayer et al<sup>15</sup> evaluated communication by measuring staff members' perception of communication. A qualitative study by Lingard et al<sup>16</sup> identified four

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