

# Dr. Congeniality: Understanding the Importance of Surgeons' Nontechnical Skills Through 360° Feedback

Julie J. Lanz, PhD,\* Paul J. Gregory, PhD,<sup>†</sup> Mariano E. Menendez, MD,<sup>‡,1</sup> and Larry Harmon, PhD<sup>†</sup>

\*Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska at Kearney Copeland Hall, Kearney, Nebraska;

<sup>†</sup>Physicians Development Program/PULSE 360 Program, Miami, Florida; and <sup>‡</sup>Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts

**OBJECTIVE:** Physician performance is a complex construct that is broadly defined by technical and nontechnical components. The primary aim of this study was to identify which Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability) in surgeons were related to patient satisfaction and teamwork performance in a surgical setting. A secondary aim of this study was to examine the specific perceptions of physician behavior related to patient satisfaction and teamwork performance.

**DESIGN:** Orthopedic surgeons received anonymous multi-source 360° feedback from managers, colleagues, nurses, technicians, and trainees. Personality traits were categorized with a modified Delphi Consensus technique using the Big Five framework. Patient satisfaction was measured using retrospective Clinician & Group—Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and System (CG-CAHPS) data. Teamwork performance was measured using the Quality PULSE 360 Teamwork Index.

**SETTING:** Research was performed at a large academic medical center in the northeastern United States.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Participants in this study included a sample of 24 orthopedic surgeons.

**RESULTS:** Backward stepwise regressions were used to determine which model with the most variance used the fewest explanatory variables. Personality traits acted as predictor variables in the regression models and patient

satisfaction and teamwork performance were utilized as outcome variables. The higher the physicians' emotional stability, the higher patients' overall satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ) and willingness to recommend them to other patients ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Furthermore, high emotional stability was related to effective surgical teams as rated by team members ( $\beta = -0.75$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) such that the more emotionally stable physicians were, the higher their teamwork rating by colleagues.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Both physicians-in-training and in-practice physicians may benefit from engaging in empathic and constructive behaviors with patients and team members. (J Surg Ed ■■■■-■■■. © 2018 Association of Program Directors in Surgery. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

**KEY WORDS:** surgeon, 360-degree feedback, personality, patient satisfaction, teamwork

**COMPETENCIES:** Interpersonal and Communication Skills, Patient Care, Professionalism

## INTRODUCTION

Over a decade ago, the Institute of Medicine published a report highlighting the importance of making fundamental changes to the U.S. health care system in order to improve the quality of health care delivery for Americans.<sup>1</sup> This report established six goals for 21st century health care, one of which was implementing patient-centered care that would be more responsive to patient preferences and needs. As a consequence of this, recent U.S. legislative changes like the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) of 2010 have mandated patient satisfaction measures as a means of improving patient-centered care.

Correspondence: Inquiries to Julie J. Lanz, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska at Kearney Copeland Hall, 320B 2507 11th Avenue, Kearney, NE 68849; e-mail: lanzjj@unk.edu

<sup>1</sup> Present address: Department of Orthopedics, Tufts Medical Center, 800 Washington Street #306, Boston, MA 02111.

In 2017, physician performance became tied to financial incentives for those doctors who take on Medicare patients as a means of improving patient-centered care.<sup>2</sup> Despite the tenuous status of the PPACA, one survey of hospital C-suite executives conducted after the 2016 election found that even if the PPACA is amended or repealed, 68% of executives were interested in keeping incentives related to expanded Medicaid coverage,<sup>3</sup> which includes measures of physician performance.<sup>4</sup> Physician performance is a complex construct that can be broadly defined by both technical and nontechnical components.<sup>5-7</sup> Technical components, such as declarative knowledge, technical skills, decision making, and cognitive ability, are often promoted as important predictors of clinical performance for both physicians-in-training and in-practice physicians. However, nontechnical components such as teamwork and personality are less frequently recognized for their importance despite preliminary research indicating their importance for patient satisfaction.<sup>8-10</sup>

One common method of describing personality is through the Big Five model of personality traits (Table 1).<sup>11,12</sup> Open people are intellectual and adventurous. Conscientious individuals are highly achievement oriented and have high levels of impulse control. Extraverts are outgoing and tend to feel more energized after being around others. Agreeable individuals are altruistic and prefer to get along with others. Lastly, people high in emotional stability do not get easily distressed and are less vulnerable to stress.

**TABLE 1.** Descriptions of the Big Five Model of Personality Traits

Trait	Description
Openness	Are intellectual, curious, adventurous, have deep conversations, enjoy new ideas, and tend to be more open to their emotions and feelings.
Conscientiousness	Have a tendency to self-regulate, successfully complete tasks, do not neglect duties, are highly achievement oriented, and follow planned schedules well.
Extraversion	Are outgoing, social, captivating, and assertive; extraverts warm up quickly to others, tend to feel more energized after being around a group of people, and do not stay in the background.
Agreeableness	High levels of altruism, trustworthiness, compassion, and generosity; these individuals accept others as they are and prefer to get along with others.
Emotional stability	Are relaxed, calm, and confident; do not get easily distressed or panicked, do not have mood swings, and are less vulnerable to stress and frustration.

Note. Examples are adapted from the 100-item IPIP for measuring Big Five personality traits.<sup>22</sup>

Given the complex role of a surgeon as a diagnostician and a customer service provider,<sup>13</sup> it is vital to understand how the full range of these personality traits may affect physician performance.<sup>14,15</sup> According to the Big Five model of personality traits, surgeons are more conscientious, extraverted, and emotionally stable than other specialties, and less agreeable and less open.<sup>16,17</sup> Other studies have found similar perceptions of surgeons as being excitable, less inhibited, and even aggressive in their interactions with nursing staff.<sup>18</sup> Surgeon personality traits do appear to change throughout their career, potentially owing to training and experience, but as a group surgeons tend to conform less to rules and regulations, and exhibit less empathy when compared to family practitioners and anesthesiologists.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, little research has examined the impact of these personality traits on job outcomes. In other words, why should it matter what type of personality a surgeon has? What role does personality play in patient satisfaction and effective teamwork for surgeons? Prior research has demonstrated the importance of emotional intelligence as a predictor of patients' satisfaction ratings as well as colleague/staff ratings of teamwork.<sup>20</sup> This study builds upon prior research<sup>20</sup> to further evaluate the relationship between how physicians interact with their team members and how they treat their patients. Specifically, we sought to identify the aspects of physician personality that were most impactful to qualitative perceptions of teamwork. This analysis should provide an avenue for identifying behavioral teaching points. This study expands on that previous research by exploring how personality traits, which are key predictors of behavior, relate to patient satisfaction and teamwork performance. By understanding how qualitative comments related to personality traits affect others' perceptions of a surgeon's behavior, we can better inform surgeons/surgeons-in-training about how to effectively self-monitor their behavior and approach interactions with others.

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate two research questions: (1) Are open-ended feedback-based on the Big Five personality traits related to measures of patient satisfaction and teamwork performance? and (2) What specific physician behaviors as described in open-ended feedback are predictive of patient satisfaction and teamwork performance?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Ethics

Approval was received from the university's institutional review board.

### Design

A mixed (qualitative and quantitative) correlational research design was used utilizing the data of  $N = 24$  orthopedic

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