

Smells Like Team Spirit? Distilling Team Coordination Into Usable Tools

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Emergencies in anaesthesia require multiple tasks to be undertaken rapidly, usually requiring a team approach. Often, because the individuals within the team change frequently, the actual team members managing an emergency do not get the opportunity to work and practice together before an event occurs.

The current approach to improving team functioning has been to ensure all members of the team have training to help equip them with the required 'non-technical' skills [1]. However, it is expensive and time-consuming to undertake simulation training to address these issues, and simulation facilities may not be readily accessible to all.

Another suggested approach is the use of checklists, displayed prompts and algorithms to help anaesthetists and anaesthetic teams in dealing with emergencies [2]. Checklists and other so called 'cognitive aids' may help by providing a standard order and comprehensive list of procedures to the practitioner, however their effect on team functioning is less clear.

A comprehensive review of the use of cognitive aids in anaesthetic crises was undertaken [3]. Fifteen cognitive aids were identified from searches of the health, allied health and psychology databases. Only three studies addressed the effect of cognitive aids on team functioning, however all three had methodological flaws, and the findings were contradictory.

Personal experience of measuring team performance in three settings will be presented: 1) Anaesthetic teams managing an MH crisis, 2) Real world videoed trauma resuscitations, 3) Medical student scenarios. Finally, best practice recommendations will be reviewed for the development and testing of cognitive aids for anaesthetic emergencies.

Evidence from other settings suggests that cognitive aids have a positive effect on individual performance and that the team's structure may be affected by their introduction [4]. Measures of team performance and coordination in healthcare emergencies are still experimental; nevertheless, emerging evidence it suggests that cognitive aids have a profound effect on team functioning. Whether this translates into improved patient outcomes remains to be seen.

References

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