

The Anaesthetist as a Team Player: Speed Dating and Other Useful Skills

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A team of champions doesn't always turn out to be a champion team. This presentation will provide the evidence to support the need for improving our understanding of how teams work, and identify the critical elements of team behaviours that can make a difference.

The literature on adverse events and critical incidents points to failures in team communication as a frequent contributing factor. Closed claim studies have identified problems with team co-ordination as a major issue, which could have been avoided by a well functioning team. Observational studies of operating room teams (Lingard 2004) have confirmed frequent failures in communications between team members, many of which have an observable adverse consequence. Simulation-based studies, including those of our University of Auckland group, have linked good team skills to improved performance. Furthermore, there is emerging evidence that good teamwork improves patient safety (Manser 2009) and that teams seem to make fewer mistakes than individuals. (Volpe 1996).

However, although anaesthetists work alongside other health professionals, they are trained in separate disciplines and may not have the skills to work effectively together. However, rather than simply exhorting doctors to become team players, what is it that we actually need to do or change in our practice to improve how our own teams work?

Creating a team is a proactive function. The teamwork literature provides a very useful model to consider the range of tasks and behaviours that are required to make a team function (Rousseau, Aube et al. 2006). These may vary under different circumstances. Furthermore, there is an emerging body of literature in healthcare defining the attributes of well functioning team members, including the ANTS behavioural markers (Fletcher 2006) and the "Auckland Behavioural Rater" (Fregley 2009).

Putting these two bodies of thought together, a few critical elements are emerging, along with some evidence that simple things can make a difference. The following seem to be important; assessing team capabilities; sharing information within the team; creating an environment for collaboration; and task co-ordination.

In this presentation we will identify a set of critical behaviours, provide some supporting evidence, and provide some simple tips on how we can turn our team of champions into a champion team.

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