Summary of articles: Flin et al. (2008); Lee et al. (2008)

Non-Technical Skills (NTS) and Conflict Resolution

Flin et al. describe a prototype training course with the purpose of raising surgeons’ awareness of non-technical skills.

The concept that non-technical (i.e., cognitive and interpersonal) competencies affecting successful practice—like running a smooth OR—are truly skills that we can develop is not new, but it is slowly emerging from unconsciously acquired skills to defined, purposefully acquired and assessed competencies.

“These are not new skills for surgeons; most surgeons are aware of the need for good leadership, clear communication, and continuous anticipation during the surgery. However, the feedback from participants was that they found explicit structure and review, as well as discussion of these behaviours, helpful for self-reflection and for considering how they mentored trainees”.

Panels of 44 consultant surgeons created a taxonomy of non-technical skills for surgeons (NOTSS).

NOTSS: The set of skills used when performing tasks and carrying out procedures with interacting with each other and the underlying systems.

NOTSS consists of:
1. Situation awareness
2. Decision making
3. Communication and teamwork
4. Leadership

Many of these skills have been uncovered using qualitative research.

Team training would be the ideal way to incorporate this into the OR. However, the same people do not always work together or in the same way, so a shared understanding of the situation and roles cannot be expected.

(The NOTSS booklet derived from this work is available at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/iprc/notss)

Lee et al. suggest that conflict management, which is a component of both the CanMEDS and ACGME frameworks of medical education, has not been explicitly taught. Surgery, as with most fields in medicine, is a specialty where the “team concept” is vital for the care of patients.

Conflict is defined as: “a state of disharmony between incompatible persons, ideas, or interests”.

Types of conflict:
- Intrapersonal (conflict with oneself) vs. Interpersonal (between individuals/our world)
In general, we are good at neither conflict management nor conflict resolution.

Leadership with a repertoire of styles, flexibility, and good communication are key components to effective conflict management.

The authors describe three models of conflict resolution: 1) **7-Step Model**, 2) **Principle-based model**, and 3) **History and physical model**. Each of these can be applied to conflict in the OR, wards, and among colleagues.

**How this applies to teaching in the OR**

1. **Non Technical skills**
   - Non-technical skills are being identified, coded, and analysed like medical content.
   - How we do things has a great impact on how well we care for our patients.
   - We need to participate in the process of uncovering the nuances and principles of what we do as surgeons, validate the concept of paying attention to process as much as content, begin to practice these concepts in a conscious way and train our learners to also do so.
   - We cannot continue to train residents “like I was trained”.

2. **Conflict Resolution**
   - Conflict management (and subsequent resolution) is one of the non-technical skills we rely on for good communication, good professional practice, and patient safety.
   - Training future surgeons to understand, diagnose, and manage conflict situations is important and useful.
   - There are myriad ways to approach this challenge.

What can we do **TODAY**?

1. We can adopt a system we feel is useful.
2. Practice it to competence.
3. Model it for trainees and for our workplace collaborators (share).

**Additional references:**

**Non-technical skills:**


*These papers demonstrate how non-technical skills (NTS) are currently being examined in surgery. The patient safety movement is having the effect of slowly morphing towards training practicing doctors and other health care workers in a new paradigm of interprofessional collaboration. So, although this was not such a hot topic in the faculty development sessions we had, it deserves a look to see how NTS is being incorporated consciously into our practices as an example of how other NTSs like professional conduct, appropriate communication, feedback, evaluation, etc. can be incorporated as we more fully develop these themes. This has great implications for us as teachers and for our learners.

**Conflict resolution:**