

Reducing Preoperative Anxiety in Surgical Patients through the Use of Effective Communication Techniques

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Question

The purpose of this research project was to investigate hospitals' current efforts to reduce preoperative anxiety in surgical patients, how effective these efforts are, and what further action hospitals could take to target preoperative anxiety.

This project covers what preoperative anxiety is, why it needs to be addressed, and how hospitals can use effective, standardized communication to help reduce it in surgical patients.

Introduction

What is Preoperative anxiety?

- Surgical patients experience the most anxiety during the preoperative period before being taken into surgery
- Causes: unfamiliarity, uncertainty, vulnerability, time to consider the risks, unfavorable outcomes
- Symptoms: increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased respiratory rate, cardiac arrhythmias

Preoperative Anxiety increases risk of complications

- Experienced in 60-80% of surgical patients
- Complications before and during surgery
- Complications during the postoperative period

Reducing Preoperative anxiety through communication techniques such as:

- Presenting information in a way that is easy to understand
- Clearing up misconceptions and preventing miscommunications between professionals and patients, and between different medical professionals
- Communication frameworks, which:
 - Encourage symmetry of information between medical professionals
 - Result in appropriate delivery of information to patients
 - Facilitate medical professionals in managing the conditions of their patients
 - Address any anxiety or stress by using proper communication techniques

Methods

- Analysis of data provided by researchers from the Studer Group
- Evaluation of Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) Survey results
- Interviews with medical professionals Gene Adamos (Director of Perioperative Services, Adventist Health Simi Valley) and Dr. Brian Supple (Board certified general surgeon affiliated with Adventist Health Simi Valley, Los Robles Hospital and Medical Center, Los Robles Surgery Center, Specialty Surgical Center of Westlake Village, Thousand Oaks Surgical Hospital)

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|----------|---------------------|---|
| A | Acknowledge | The way one greets a patient and friends or family members present |
| I | Introduction | Includes providing the patient with skill set, professional certification, and experience |
| D | Duration | Expectation for tests or updates and the identification of the next steps to be taken |
| E | Explanation | Explanation of the impending process and the allowing of the patient to ask questions |
| T | Thank You | Expression of gratitude for the patient's cooperation choosing of the hospital |

One communication framework investigated in this research is the Studer Group's AIDET. Because patients better understand their care, AIDET improves clinical outcomes by reducing patient anxiety.

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|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| S | Situation | Statement of the issue at hand |
| B | Background | Info relevant to the situation |
| A | Assessment | Options to address situation |
| R | Recommendation | Recommended next steps to take |
| Q | Question | Opportunity for questions |

SBAR is the second communication framework discussed in this research. It standardizes communication between medical professionals and decreases miscommunications that could upset the patient.

Results

The studies provided by the Studer Group support six aspects of effective communication used in hospitals

- Nurse-Patient Communication
- Standardized Communication and HCAHPS Scores
- Patients' Perception of Physician
- Demonstrating Empathy and HCAHPS Scores
- Relationship-Centered Communication and Patient Satisfaction
- Structured Communication and Improved Patient Outcomes

The evidence that supports AIDET®

- Patients' rating of care correlates with their physician's communication skills
- Formal greeting is important because the majority of patients want their physicians to shake their hand and address them by their name
- Factors that encourage trust in a physician include the physician listening, providing the patient with as much medical information as they desire
- Physician behaviors that contribute to patient adherence to care result in improved clinical outcomes Physicians with lower patient satisfaction results are more likely to have patient complaints, the majority of which are related to communication issues

Efforts from local hospitals

- Adventist Health Simi Valley: Implementation of AIDET, participation in the HCAHPS Survey to determine if the medical professionals are properly using AIDET
- Hospitals affiliated with Dr. Brian Supple: SBAR framework for standardizing communication between medical professionals

Discussion

Limitations of communication frameworks

- Not all medical professionals receive training
 - Adventist Health Simi Valley only has nurses and technicians trained in AIDET, not anesthesiologists or surgeons
- Framework training not required
 - Los Robles Hospital and Medical Center has implemented the SBAR framework, but it is only a suggestions, not a requirement

Future efforts for hospitals to improve the methods they use to target preoperative anxiety

- Mandate communication framework training
 - Standardized communication and communication frameworks work best when all medical professionals that interact with patients receive training
 - It is the goal of Adventist Health Simi Valley to include anesthesiologists and surgeons in AIDET training in the future
- Clinical hospital psychologist
 - None of the hospitals involved in or affiliated with this study allow patients access to a professional with training in psychology, but both Adamos and Supple agree that, at least for larger hospitals, a clinical hospital psychologist would benefit patients and provide for them a way to communicate concerns and reduce any anxiety
- Adjust Medical School curriculum
 - Dr. Supple claims that, as a surgeon, he received no specific training in medical school that covers preoperative anxiety or effective communication with patients
 - Medical professionals aren't properly prepared to help patients cope with preoperative anxiety, so institutions should consider incorporating the issue into the medical school curriculum

Conclusions

Ultimately, because of the negative effects associated with preoperative anxiety in surgical patients, such as complications during the intraoperative and postoperative periods, it is necessary for medical professionals that interact with patients during the preoperative period to use effective communication techniques to provide an environment conducive to reducing anxiety and improving the patient's perioperative experience.