Diversity and ethics in trauma and acute care surgery teams: results from an international survey

Team Dynamics study Group – Collaborative Project

Objectives

- Investigating the context of trauma and acute care surgery.
- Understanding the factors that can enhance some ethical aspects.
- Understanding the importance of patient consent, the perceptiveness of the ethical role of the trauma leader, and the perceived importance of ethics as an educational subject.

Methods

- The article employs an international questionnaire promoted by the World Society of Emergency Surgery.
- An online population-based survey was used to gather demographic, experience, and practice-based information about the trauma surgeons participating in the study and their team dynamics.

Introduction

- Trauma is the leading cause of death. Indeed, trauma teams must deal with extreme stress and time constraints, not rarely with no awareness of the trauma causes nor the patients' identity, current circumstances or conditions, or patients' desires about the treatment options, and must cope with the risk of unanticipated incidents.
- Within this context, traditional organizational practices are less effective, and integrative mechanisms such as team assembly decisions might be the only opportunity to coordinate team member actions and increase performance

Results and discussion

- Our results aim to understand the factors that can influence how three ethical matters are perceived in trauma surgery teams. Through the analysis of 402 fully filled questionnaires by surgeons working in 72 different countries, three main ethical topics were investigated through the lens of gender, membership of an academic or non-academic institution, of a trauma team, and a diverse group.
- Regarding the importance of obtaining consent from the injured patient, results highlight greater attention paid by surgeons belonging to academic institutions, official trauma teams, and diverse groups. The topic of surgical consent has been changing its meaning over time.
- While once it was considered more as a legal and administrative duty before the operation, the recent literature has underlined how informed consent is an essential tool to communicate with the patient, understand his or her wishes and concerns toward the relevance of a shared decision-making .
- In this perspective, the more recent paradigm sees the surgeons needing to "speak less and listen more" to ensure better knowledge translation with their patients. This may shine a light to ethical issues in trauma and emergency surgery, as understanding the patient's wishes is not always feasible.

Results and discussion

- Surgeons working in academic environments and belonging to trauma teams pay greater attention to the topic of consent. This may depend on the patient-centric organizational culture and ongoing debate concerning patients' consent which appears to be more assertive in academic institutions and within formalized trauma teams.
- Diverse groups record outstanding results rather than those from non-diverse ones.
- While diversity in practice may be challenging due to the differences among members, it has been proven to lead to exceptional outcomes.
- It may be reasonable that professionals who are already focused on bridging the difference with their peers are likely to do so even with their patients.
- Once again, surgeons of diverse teams gave the highest evaluation in terms of their agreement. Therefore, we can claim that those actively engaging with diverse groups of people feel that ethics is crucial in ensuring smooth team dynamics and better patient outcomes.
- Surgeons have been stereotyped as "abrasive, arrogant and difficult to work with", and those simplified images have influenced the way they interact with colleagues and patients. Informed consent is the ethical expression of respect for the patient's autonomy.

Results and discussion

- While previous studies showed that physicians in general no longer make paternalistic decisions for patients, our results show that less diverse trauma teams might pay less attention to patient wishes.

Conclusion

- Our results underline that some organizational factors might lead to the development of a higher sensibility on ethical matters.
- Embracing cultural diversity forces trauma teams to deal with different mindsets. Organizations should, therefore, consider those elements in defining their organizational procedures.

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