

Checklists May Improve 'Crisis' Care in the OR

Kristina Fiore

Using a checklist helped assure compliance with processes set up to handle a crisis situation -- such as a cardiac arrest or massive hemorrhage -- in the operating room, researchers found.

Teams using checklists were 75-percent less likely to miss a critical step in resolving a simulated crisis than teams that relied on memory to recall what they should do, a group of researchers that included one of the most well-known proponents of checklists -- Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, of Brigham & Women's Hospital -- reported in the Jan. 17 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

"Under these simulated circumstances, teams did substantially better with the checklist," Gawande said in an interview with MedPage Today -- although he acknowledged that the study couldn't assess whether using the checklist translated to better patient outcomes.

"These events happen so rarely, you won't get randomized controlled trials to test them," Gawande said. "But the simulation was enough to convince [some centers] to move forward with implementing [the crisis checklist] in the real world."

Those centers include Brigham & Women's and the Kaiser Permanente health system, which will be monitoring to see whether the crisis checklists indeed translate to better care, Gawande said.

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