

# Are 'Safety Scalpels' Safer Than Standard Scalpels?

Skeptical Scalpel



A Twitter follower wrote me this: "hospital making me use 'safety scalpel' w/retractable sheath. I've almost cut myself x 2. Do you know of any data about it?"

That got me interested because I like to question things. Was this going to be yet another rule without evidence?

I thought I would have to do an exhaustive search to see if anyone had ever studied the question of whether so-called 'safety scalpels' really are safer than standard scalpels.

I was pleasantly surprised to find a 2013 paper in the Canadian Journal of Surgery which reviewed the literature on the subject. The authors, from the University of British Columbia, found no studies that addressed harm reduction and the use of safety scalpels. A previous paper from Australia in 2009 also found no randomized trials of safety scalpel use.

In their discussion, the authors point out that the introduction of safety scalpels might have the opposite effect on safety due to factors such as personnel not being familiar with how they work and that safety scalpels have never been subjected to rigorous evaluation by failure mode and effects analysis. And they noted that injuries related to the use of safety scalpels have been reported.

Since there is no proof that safety scalpels are effective in reducing injuries, there seems to be no rationale for regulatory agencies or hospitals to mandate their use.

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