



The Surgical Safety Checklist at Ross Memorial Hospital

Background

- Beginning July 30, 2010, eligible hospitals in Ontario, including Ross Memorial Hospital, will post their Surgical Safety Checklist compliance rate on their websites.
- There is a lot of work being done at RMH to continue improving patient safety, and the surgical safety checklist is one example of the tools in place to ensure every patient receives the best quality care.
- The use of a Surgical Safety Checklist (SSCL) has been adopted by many hospitals around the world as a tool for ensuring the consistent implementation of patient safety best practices in their operating rooms.
- The SSCL covers the most common tasks and items that operating room teams carry out, and has been shown to reduce rates of death and complications among patients.

What is the Surgical Safety Checklist (SSCL)?

The SSCL is a patient safety communication tool that is used by a team of operating room professionals (nurses, surgeons, anesthesiologists, and others) to discuss important details about a surgical case in the OR suite at three distinct stages or phases during surgery:

Briefing (before the patient is put to sleep), **Time Out** (just before the first incision), and **Debriefing** (during or after surgical closure). The SSCL is used to facilitate operating room team discussion so that everyone is familiar about the case, and reduces reliance on memory for certain necessary interventions. In many ways, the surgical checklist is similar to an airline pilot's checklist used just before take-off. It is a last minute check to make sure everything is in working order, all equipment is available, and everyone is ready to proceed.

Why are SSCLs important?

Operating room teams have many important steps to follow in order to ensure a safe and effective surgery for every patient, and the SSCL is a useful tool that helps facilitate good communication among the health care team. Essentially, the checklist is about improving overall teamwork – a critical factor in producing positive clinical outcomes. There is a lot of work being done in Ontario right now to improve patient safety, and the surgical safety checklist is one component.

What type of information is included in a SSCL?

SSCLs are divided into three parts relating to different phases of a surgery, and each section of the checklist has information that is relevant to that phase. For example, in the Pre-induction phase, there are questions about blood type, or specific equipment needed for the surgery. This helps ensure that the right blood or equipment is available before the surgery begins. The Time-Out phase contains a “double check” of the surgery site. The Debriefing phase contains information that is relevant to the surgery just completed and includes recovery plans for the patient.

How is the rate calculated?

The percent compliance is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{# of times all three phases of the surgical safety checklist was performed}}{\text{Total surgeries}} \times 100 = \% \text{ compliance}$$

The surgical safety checklist is considered “performed” when the designated checklist coordinator confirms that surgical team members have implemented and/or addressed all of the necessary tasks and items in each of the three phases: Briefing; Time Out; and Debriefing. Therefore, the SSCL compliance indicator is a process measure, measuring the degree to which all three phases of the SSCL were performed completely for each surgical patient.

How does the SSCL impact patient safety at RMH?

The new three-phase Surgical Safety Checklist will be an effective tool to help keep our patients safe because it organizes all the important information contained in previous checklists into an integrated master checklist. It is a team communication tool that is used to inform all team members about important details regarding the patient and the surgery at key moments. It reduces reliance on memory so that one person is not responsible for remembering every single step needed for a safe surgery.

The new three phased SSCL was trialed last year in a world-wide study, led by the World Health Organization. The investigators found that using a SSCL could lead to reduced surgical complications and mortality, whether carried out in developed or developing nations. The study appeared in the January 29, 2009 print edition of the New England Journal of Medicine, and started a world-wide movement to adopt surgical safety checklists to improve patient safety.

Using a SSCL seems like an obvious strategy to use during a surgery. Haven't hospitals been checking these things in the past?

Operating room teams have used different types of checklists for many years; now, surgical teams are enhancing their own safety checks with a standard tool. At RMH, staff in the OR had been using a system called “Pause for the Cause”. Prior to a surgical procedure, the team stopped, checked the identification of the patient again, double-checked they were doing the right procedure in the right place, discussed any drug allergies the patient suffered from, and made sure the patient had received antibiotics. By enhancing our existing surgical safety checklist by the new standard tool developed for all hospitals in Ontario, the RMH “Pause for the Cause” will be just one of three safety checks that teams are required to perform with each surgical procedure.

What exactly is being publicly reported, and how often?

Beginning July 30, 2010, each eligible hospital (those with operating rooms) will post its compliance rate on its website, shown as a percentage where all three phases of the new checklist were performed for all surgical procedures during that period. Hospitals will be posting the bi-annual percentage compliance on the hospital's website. The first reporting period will cover the first three months of the fiscal year.

How will RMH use the information?

The public reporting of our hospital's SSCL percentage compliance allows our team to establish a baseline from which they can track their percentage compliance over time. Should percentage compliance decrease at all over time, we'll be able to target areas for improvement.

Where is the SSCL posted? Where can the public access more patient safety information?

The SSCL compliance rate is posted on the Ross Memorial Hospital's website, www.rmh.org. It's also accessible on the Ministry of Health & Long Term Care website, www.ontario.ca/patientsafety. These sites also show other patient safety indicators, such as our rates of healthcare acquired infections, and our hand hygiene compliance rate.

Our Commitment

Public reporting of our patient safety scores is important because it will allow us to work with a standardized approach across the province. Our commitment to our patients is one of safety and continuous improvement. We monitor our results closely, identifying areas for improvement and implementing strategies to ensure our patients are safe.