Objectives

- Define Surgical Conscience
- Apply the concept of surgical conscience to the behaviors and practices that exemplify professional nursing practice in the OR.
- Discuss some of the barriers to surgical conscience.
- Discuss how we can promote surgical conscience in our own practice.

Welcome to Surgical Conscience

“conscience is that still, small voice that is sometimes too loud for comfort”

Bert Murray
Doing the RIGHT thing: surgical conscience

Most definitions reflect the use of sterile technique in maintaining a sterile field.
Sterility is only ONE aspect of this concept.

Definition

Surgical conscience is:

“the professional behavior that demonstrates the understanding and application of aseptic technique AND the legal, ethical and moral responsibilities to our patients and team members for which each practitioner is accountable”

Retrieved from www.nursingrounds.blogspot.com

Surgical conscience

Surgical conscience=

placing the patient’s well-being and interests above EVERYTHING

It is about exhibiting ethical behavior and promoting patient safety
What is Surgical Conscience?

- Surgical conscience is both individual and collective
  - Ethical Behavior
  - Having a good moral compass
  - Sound Judgment
  - Honesty
  - Trustworthiness
  - Professional Responsibility
  - Being the patient’s advocate
  - Speaking up

Moral compass

Sometimes, in order to follow our moral compass and/or our hearts, we have to make unpopular decisions or stand up for what we believe in.

Tabitha Coffey

Surgical Conscience

- It is expressed daily through your practice in every action and decision you make as a healthcare provider.
- Includes the belief that you will promote patient safety and do the right thing even when no one is present.
- Is a concept which can be applied to any practice situation.
- Is the responsibility of every member of the surgical team.
- Be proactive: take on the challenges of learning and change.
Surgical Conscience and Teamwork

- A team is defined as a group of two or more individuals who must interact to adapt to achieve a common objective
- Each team member brings their own set of skills, knowledge and attitude
- Each member has a specific role in the OR
- Each member makes the choice to practice using their surgical conscience

Collective Surgical Conscience

- The goal of the entire surgical team should be to ensure the safety of the patient and each team member
- The entire surgical team is responsible for working together to promote surgical conscience.
- The surgical team functions in a complex and dynamic environment.
- Keep in mind that, promoting surgical conscience is not about loyalty to friends and colleagues. As a result, it may lead to challenging situations.

Practice

- The decisions you make in practicing surgical conscience will have a direct impact on the quality of care your patient receives.
- Acting on surgical conscience involves knowledge, self-awareness, intelligence, and the courage to make ethical and moral decisions that benefit the patient.
So how does it work in practice?

- Universal protocol:
  - Patient Identification
  - Preventing wrong site, wrong patient, wrong procedures
  - Positioning: preventing potentially devastating injuries
  - Informed Consent: ensuring that the patient understands their proposed procedure
  - Mini-Count: follow best practices for counting practices and resolution of discrepancies
  - Medication administration: confirming allergies, medication name, timing and dosage
  - Specimens: ensuring that they are identified and handled properly
  - Breaks in sterile technique

Barriers to Surgical Conscience

- Communication or lack thereof
- External forces that control healthcare practices today may interfere with personal surgical conscience; do more with less
- Working in a potentially or a perceived punitive environment
- Misguided loyalty to friends and coworkers
- Lateral violence: bullying and intimidation
- Acceptance of deviation from best practices

Promoting Surgical Conscience

- Choose how you will practice
- Be the patient advocate
- Prepare for the unexpected
- Foster a learning culture: become a life long learner
- Promote team work
- Promote communication among team members: ask for clarification
- Create a culture of safety
You have been assigned to work with Dr. Smith. Your preceptor has told you that he can be a bear to work with.
You have met your patient, verified their identification and consent and brought them into the OR.
First thing, Dr. Smith starts barking orders related to the next surgery.
Your patient is not under anesthesia at this time, what would you do?

You are circulating a case, when you notice that the electrosurgical pencil has fallen off the field and is hanging slightly below the OR table level.
What should you do?
You suggest that the electrosurgical pencil should be changed, but the surgeon refuses
What would you do next?

Your patient is having a left total knee replacement. The site is correctly marked
Your preceptor is helping you prep the patient and performs the surgical skin prep for you
When the leg is draped, the surgical site marking is not visible in the field and you notice that the right leg has been prepped and draped
What would you do?
“Integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching.”

- C. S. Lewis

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