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Raising the Standard: Improving Surgical Risk Documentation in Trauma and Orthopaedics

Informed consent is fundamental to surgical practice, requiring accurate communication of material risks. Inconsistent documentation may undermine patient understanding and medico-legal protection. In 2024, a quality improvement project was undertaken in the Trauma and Orthopaedics department of a UK district general hospital to improve standardisation of risk recording for common trauma and fracture procedures. The project evaluated whether prefilled, procedure-specific consent forms would improve the accuracy of risk documentation. Appropriate risks for each operation were agreed locally with reference to the wider literature. Prefilled forms incorporating these risks were then introduced. A retrospective review of consent forms prior to implementation was compared with a prospective audit following introduction. The proportion of operations with complete and correct risk documentation increased from 19% at baseline to 56% post-intervention. The introduction of prefilled, standardised consent forms led to a marked improvement in the accuracy of recorded surgical risks. Streamlining and standardising the consent process in trauma can enhance documentation quality, support consistent patient information, and is readily transferable to other surgical specialties.

Keywords

Consent, Risks, Orthopaedics, Standardisation, Audit, Documentation

Biography

Mr Benjamin Smith studied medicine at Lancaster Medical School and intercalated in a BSc in Anatomy, Developmental and Human Biology at King's College London, graduating with first-class honours. He completed Foundation and Core Surgical Training at Southampton and Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals. He will begin a Master's in Research at Imperial College London in October, focusing on Clinical Robotics, Image-Guided Intervention, and Artificial Intelligence. His interests include surgical innovation and quality improvement.