It’s Complicated: Managing Complications and Career Setbacks

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Disclosures

• These are my opinions AND experiences
• No financial conflicts related to this talk
• You WILL experience these
• We have nowhere near enough time
• Focus on junior career
Surgical Career Highs and Lows

Invited to AAS Fall Course!

Complications and career setbacks?
• You are doing an elective “routine” surgical procedure and there is a major intraoperative complication that has just occurred. The patient is stabilized.
  – next steps?
  – key actions and sequence?
  – things NOT to do?
You are doing an elective “routine” surgical procedure on a 10 yo boy and there is a major intraoperative complication. The patient is stabilized.

- next steps?
- key actions and sequence?
- things NOT to do?
Next Steps

• Take care of the patient
• Lead the team.....but,
• Call for help
  – surgical
  – leadership
• Take a minute to reset
• Go talk to the family IMMEDIATELY
That Tough Discussion

• Private area
• Bring help
• Get to the point!
• Give processing time
• Lay out next steps
• Focus on the patient
That Tough Discussion

• Should you use the “S” word??

Original Articles

Transparent and Open Discussion of Errors Does Not Increase Malpractice Risk in Trauma Patients

Ronald M. Stewart, MD, Michael G. Corneille, MD, Joe Johnston, MD, Kathy Geoghegan, BSN, RN, John G. Myers, MD, Daniel L. Dent, MD, Marilyn McFarland, MS, RN, Joshua Alley, MD, Basil A. Pruitt, Jr., MD, and Stephen M. Cohn, MD
Subsequent Actions

• Document excessively
  – not just “what”, but also “WHY”!
• Stay with the patient and family
  – give them way to always contact you
• Talk to someone you trust
• Take a break if you can
• Honest introspection, including M&M
Things NOT to Do

• Lose your cool, point fingers, lose control
• Alter the medical record
• Minimize or catastrophize
• Abandon the patient, short or long-term
• Blame the resident/let them hang at M&M
• Focus on potential litigation
Bad Leadership Checklist

• Rush to judgment or actions
• Throw your surgeon to the RM wolves
• Weaponize the M&M conference
• “Lead” by example – aka “I never....”
• Fail to investigate patterns/red flags
• Propagating “zero defects” mentality
May 8, 2018 -- One doctor commits suicide in the U.S. every day -- the highest suicide rate of any profession. And the number of doctor suicides -- 28 to 40 per 100,000 -- is more than twice that of the general population, new research shows. The rate in the general population is 12.3 per 100,000.
1103 Physician Suicides By Specialty

- Surg: 161
- Anesth: 138
- FM: 92
- IM: 69
- EM: 50
- Psych: 49
- OB/Gyn: 46
- Peds: 42
- Rads: 25

1103 Suicides = 969 Physicians, 134 Medical Students
920 USA, 183 International
"The perception of having made a major medical error in the previous three months was associated with a three-fold increased risk of suicidal ideation, with 16.2 percent of surgeons who reported a recent major error experiencing suicidal ideation compared with 5.4 percent of surgeons not reporting an error."
Do we ever “rise above”?

Every surgeon carries within themselves a small cemetery, where from time to time they go to pray

— Rene Leriche —
“Just Culture”

There is a “line in the sand” between driving 75 in a 65 MPH zone versus 75 down Fifth Ave

SOUNDING BOARD

Balancing “No Blame” with Accountability in Patient Safety
Robert M. Wachter, M.D., and Peter J. Pronovost, M.D., Ph.D.

“A just culture recognizes that competent professionals make mistakes and acknowledges that even competent professionals will develop unhealthy norms (shortcuts, routine rule violations), but has zero tolerance for reckless behavior.”
(AHRQ website)

“Who draws the line is the most critical question”
Dekker 2012
Just Culture - Consequences

Reckless Behavior

Conscious Disregard of Substantial and Unjustifiable Risk

Manage through:

- Remedial action
- Punitive action

At-Risk

Human

Reckless Behavior

Conscious Disregard of Substantial and Unjustifiable Risk

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Consequences

Reckless Behavior

Conscious Disregard of Substantial and Unjustifiable Risk

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Career Blips, Bumps, and Bombs
Multiple Unique Types

- Minor setback
- Major setback
- Career disaster
Honest Introspection

• Externally-inflicted?

• Self-inflicted?

• Both?
Similar Advice

• Don’t just do something.....stand there!!
• Particularly avoid lashing out
• Don’t hit “send”
• Was this truly a priority?
• Is this REALLY what you wanted?
• Get an objective opinion and advice
Take the Long View

• “Bless the broken road”
• The 10-year test
• Take responsibility, but don’t internalize failure
• Surround yourself with smarter friends
• Think like a Mujahideen
• Play the infinite game!
Game Theory for Careers

A Finite Game
- Known Players
- Fixed Rules
- Agreed upon Objectives

Example: Baseball

Playing to beat those around them
Joy comes from comparison

An Infinite Game
- Known and unknown players
- Rules change
- Objective is to keep the game in play

Example: Business

Playing to be better today than they were yesterday
Joy comes from advancement
The Infinite Game
Need to Discuss, Vent, Advice?

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