

THE WHO SAFER SURGERY CHECKLIST TIME OUT PROCEDURE REVISITED: STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE COMPLIANCE AND SAFETY

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KEY TERMS

- **Time-Out:** A brief pause taken by the surgical team immediately before making an incision. A time-out is done so that the medical team can make certain they are undertaking the correct procedure upon the right body part of the patient intended.
- **The WHO “Safe Surgery Checklist”:** A standardized tool developed to enhance patient safety in surgical settings. The checklist is used before, during, and after surgery to ensure essential safety measures and critical steps are followed. The checklist helps to minimize errors, improve communication among surgical team members, and reduce complications during surgical procedures.

BACKGROUND

Wrong surgical sites and the absence of time-outs have been significant concerns in healthcare settings. Surgical errors, which include operating on the wrong body part or performing the wrong procedure, can lead to serious patient harm and adverse events. These errors can occur due to various factors, such as miscommunication, inadequate verification processes, lack of standardization, distractions, and time pressure in the operating room. The implementation of time-outs has been advocated as a standardized practice to confirm essential details before surgery, including the correct patient, procedure, and surgical site. Time-outs are a crucial safeguard to reduce the risk of wrong-site surgeries and other surgical errors by promoting effective communication, verification, and teamwork among the surgical team.

OBJECTIVES/METHODS

In the past two decades, the implementation of a systematic time-out protocol in the operating room has significantly contributed to preventing wrong-site surgeries and other surgical never events. Despite its proven effectiveness in enhancing patient safety, compliance issues continue to pose a significant challenge in its consistent application. This review highlights the problem of poor compliance and explores various strategies that have been suggested to improve compliance and ensure safer operating room environments.

• Problem and Low Compliance Rates

The primary factor contributing to the low compliance rates with the time-out procedure appears to be healthcare workers’ (HCWs) lack of awareness regarding its importance. Additionally, the time pressure experienced by staff members due to tight schedules is another significant reason for non-compliance.

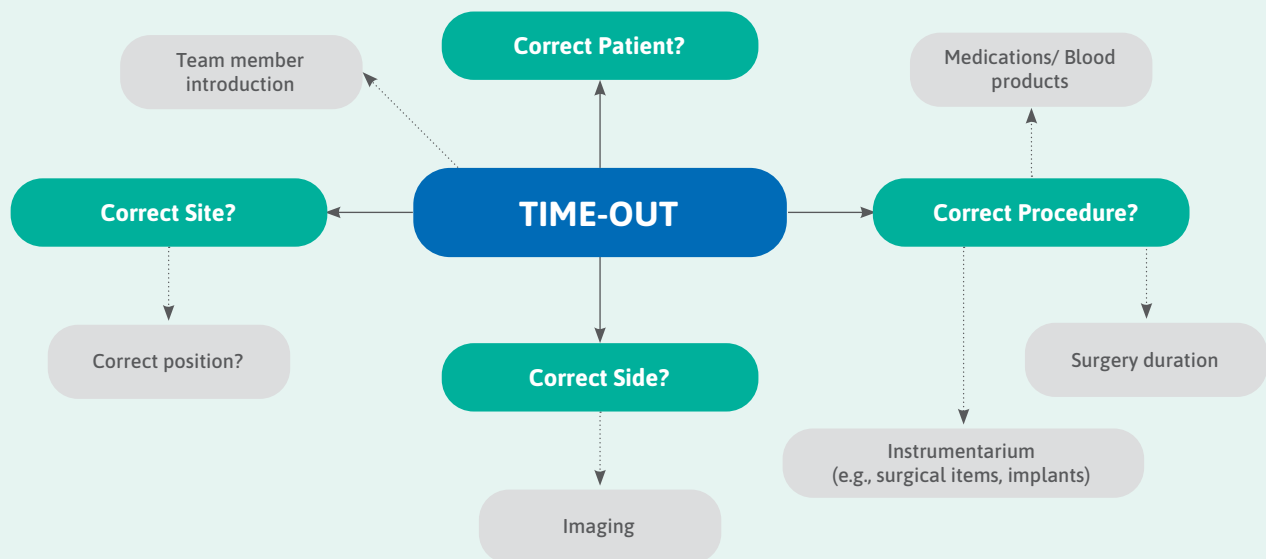


Figure 1: Time-out elements

RESULTS

Strategies for Increasing Compliance with Time-Outs



Implement **visual reminders with the word "Time-Out"** to reinforce the importance of the time-out process.



Conduct **educational interventions to increase awareness and proper execution** of time-outs among HCWs.



Provide **leadership and teamwork training to improve compliance** with time-out procedures.



Utilize **simulation-based learning programs** to enhance recognition and adherence to time-out protocols.



Explore using **audio delivery of checklists during the time-out process** to increase team involvement.



Involve patients in the time-out process to enhance their participation and satisfaction.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

A time-out should be conducted even if the operative site is not marked, ensuring confirmation of the correct procedure.

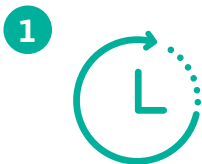
- Separate surgical teams performing multiple procedures require distinct time-outs.
- Surgeons working in multiple operating rooms should always be present during the time-out.
- Any surgical team member can initiate a time-out, although it is typically the task of the circulating nurse or surgeon.
- The time-out should be accompanied by a sign-in briefing before the surgery and a sign-out briefing after skin closure before the patient enters the post-anesthesia care unit.
- Every surgical team member should participate in the time-out to ensure the correct patient, procedure, and site.
- A comprehensive time-out includes reviewing the surgeon, the patient's position, surgical items or implants to be used, and medications or blood products to be administered.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring the proper execution of the time-out process is essential to prevent wrong-site surgeries and other adverse events, making it a critical component of the WHO checklist. However, despite the numerous benefits associated with time-outs, compliance rates still need to improve, primarily due to a lack of awareness among HCWs regarding their significance. To address this issue, various strategies, mainly educational in nature, should be implemented to increase compliance and improve the understanding of the importance of time-outs.

APPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

The primary conclusion of this article documents the importance of time-out in preventing wrong site surgeries, the need for improved HCW compliance and several strategies that can help improve outcomes.



1 Be aware that the time-out procedure has been proven to prevent wrong site surgeries.



2 Work with your facility to improve compliance by ensuring a standardized process for time-out exists and regular audits and education are taking place.



3 Implement the use of visual reminders for awareness, provide routine education, involve leadership and patients in the time-out process to improve success.

Note: This clinical summary is written by clinicians at Ansell Healthcare Products, LLC. Please refer to the actual study for full text information.

Reference:

Papadakis M, Meiwandi A, Grzybowski A. The WHO safer surgery checklist time out procedure revisited: Strategies to optimize compliance and safety. *Int J Surg.* 2019;69:19-22.

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