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“HAVING GOOD HANDS IS NOT ENOUGH” IMPROVING SURGICAL SKILLS AND OUTCOMES: A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE APPROACH

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Introduction:

To summarise the authors exploration of what makes a good surgeon and what makes them better drawing from disciplines as diverse as sports psychology and elite athletes, virtuoso musicians and airline pilots, Toyota car manufacturing and failure, heuristics and personality. Good surgery is much more than simply having good hands.

Materials and methods:

A literature review conducted over 18 months resulting in the publication of the author's book due July 2024 by Springer-Nature. "Improving Surgical Skills and Outcomes: A Multi-Perspective Approach. Three perspectives or 'boxes' were selected to explore the topic. Box 1 explores what happens in the moment of surgery. This box draws on work from Sports Psychology and applying techniques to improve surgery in the moment of, and in preparation for, surgery. Techniques include imagery and goal setting theory and their application of surgery. Box 2 explores the planning of surgery drawing on the application of 'Lean' processing as described in the 'Toyota Production System' from car manufacturing, the need to eliminate waste (Muda) and embrace 'Kaizen' or continuous improvement. Box 3 explores system thinking, complex problem solving amongst novices and experts and heuristics as well as personality. These have very powerful but almost subconscious effects on surgery, like the tiny rudder on a huge ship, sitting beneath the waves.

Results:

Having good hands is not enough to become a good surgeon. It is perhaps the least useful perspective to assess surgery and yet draws the most attention at meetings. The author argues for a more holistic approach to excellence in surgery than simply technique alone and seeks to make manifest the subtle and yet powerful influences on surgery that decision making heuristics and avoidance of failure have but also suggest that the application of 'Lean' methodology can provide a powerful and practical perspective on what actually happens in surgery and provide the substrate for continuous improvement and efficient use of resources.

Conclusions:

Surgeons wishing to improve at whatever level they find themselves are encouraged to look beyond technique and expose underlying assumptions and practices. This multi-perspective approach provides multiple avenues the surgeon can explore that can result in marginal gains in the direction of excellence. Great surgery is not achieved by magic, it is slow, deliberate formation in the direction of excellence in multiple perspectives over time. Conventional audit is challenged as the conventional tool for assessing performance with a more detailed and nuanced 'fractal' analysis proposed.

Sources:

Too numerous to list!