

Doing Things Right Globally (Lancet, Lifebox and beyond)

A/Prof. Thomas Weiser

Assistant Professor of Surgery, Department of Surgery, Stanford University School of Medicine

2015 was an exceptional year for Global Surgery. First, the Disease Control Priorities Project released the first of a series of volumes evaluating the economic impact and cost effectiveness of health interventions.(1) Essential surgery was its first topic, and its adequate provision would avert 1.5 million deaths a year, which equates to 7% of all avertable deaths worldwide. Second, the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery released its key messages: 5 billion people lack access to safe, affordable surgical and anesthesia care when needed; 143 million additional surgical procedures are needed each year to save lives and prevent disability; 33 million individuals face catastrophic health expenditure due to payment for surgery and anesthesia each year; investment in surgical and anesthesia services is affordable, saves lives, and promotes economic growth; and that surgery is an indivisible, indispensable part of health care.(2) And finally, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution strengthening emergency and essential surgical and anesthesia as a component of universal health coverage.(3)

Surgical intervention is increasing, particularly in countries with very low levels of health expenditure.(4) However, the challenges to improving access to and the safety of surgery remain enormous. Mortality following surgery is incredibly variable, with up to 20-fold differences between countries falling in the Low and Middle Income economic spectrum.(5) But a number of strategies can improve care regardless of resources.

The main tenants of improvement focus on ensuring adherence to care standards through uses of checklists and the strengthening of care protocols, ensuring safe delivery and monitoring of patients under anesthesia and during perioperative recovery, improving management practices particularly as they relate to perioperative care delivery, and ensuring the consistent measurement of clinical outcomes.(6)

Lifebox is a not-for-profit organization that is leading efforts to improve perioperative safety in two ways.(7) First, we procure and distribute low-cost, high-fidelity pulse oximeters for use during anesthesia along with a structured training program aimed at anesthesia providers in poorly-resourced environments. Second, we are introducing a checklist-based intervention to reduce surgical site infections by ensuring adherence to perioperative infection prevention and control practices that include skin preparation, sterility of instruments, swab counts, antibiotic stewardship, and the integrity of gowns, gloves, and drapes.

References

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