

Information Note

First International Consultation on Improving the Safety of Surgical Care



The goal of the second Global Patient Safety Challenge, *Safe Surgery Saves Lives*, is to improve the safety of surgical care around the world. The strategy is to define a core set of minimum standards of surgical care that can be applied universally across countries and settings and that will save lives. A measurement system will be created in parallel to monitor progress and improvement.

WHO is organizing a consultation in January 2007 that will examine the current environment of surgical care across the globe and evaluate potential standards that might be adopted to improve the safety of surgery. Currently there is only limited information on the worldwide environment of surgery, including insufficient data on the resources and infrastructure committed to surgical procedures. In order to produce meaningful and appropriate standards, the gaps that exist will be examined to understand the human and financial resources, access, equipment utilization, safety and monitoring, and quality assessment issues necessary for improving the safety of surgical care. In addition, the culture of surgery itself will be scrutinized in the hope of identifying ways to improve safety.

A surgical condition has been described in Disease Control Priorities as “any condition that requires suture, incision, excision, manipulation, or other invasive procedure that usually, but not always, requires local, regional, or general anesthesia.”¹ The authors proposing this definition defend it based on two observations: surgery does not have to be performed by surgeons, and the concept of surgery should include minor surgical procedures that nurses or general practitioners could perform. Since addressing minor surgical procedures will have limited impact on the overall issues of safety, efforts will be concentrated on more substantial and invasive procedures. For the purposes of this Challenge, surgery shall be defined as any procedure involving the incision, excision, manipulation, or suturing of tissue and that usually, but not always, requires profound sedation or regional or general anesthesia.

The objective of the first consultation is to address two questions that align with the goals of the second Global Patient Safety Challenge:

- 1) What are the potential minimum standards of surgical care that can be universally applied across countries and settings and will improve the safety of surgical care?
- 2) What measurement systems can be implemented to monitor the progress and improvement of surgical safety resulting from these standards?

To this end, the scope of the consultation is to:

- present and discuss current evidence of potential interventions;
- deepen understanding of the nature of surgical services across a range of countries and health systems;
- determine how specific interventions may be implemented and standardized;
- discuss the priorities for determining which standards might be used.

¹ Debas H, et al. “Surgery”, in Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries, 2nd ed. Disease Control Priorities Project; The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2006.