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Surgical teams operate like a synchronized flight crew

OR protocol modeled after airline industry strategy

by Sheila Reynolds



Dr. James Bond looks at monitors displaying the interior of his patient's thoracic cavity. One-third of SMH's operating rooms are outfitted with an integrated system, which includes cameras and television screens that not only assist surgeons, but allow the surgery to be broadcast elsewhere.

EVAN SEAL THE LEADER

SURGEONS AT Surrey Memorial Hospital (SMH) have taken some lessons from the aviation industry to make things in the operating room flow more smoothly.

Crew Resource Management follows strategies that were formed to better prevent airplane crashes.

Specialists in that industry realized that at the root of the problem was a communication breakdown – the right hand didn't always know what the left was doing. Authorities decided that rather than have the pilot seen as the authority figure, everyone would be on an equal playing field – their input just as crucial as anyone else's.

The same thing is now happening in Surrey's operating rooms.

Instead of the surgeon being considered the leader, all those in the operating room are briefed about the entire procedure, including when the surgeon(s) will be making certain moves and what the crucial points may be.

If anyone has a question or concern, they are free to voice it.

"Everyone's now fully engaged," says Dr. James Bond, the head of thoracic surgery at Surrey Memorial. "It's made a huge difference."

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SMH at a glance

■ now has more than 400 acute care beds and 175 extended care beds

■ in a year, admits more than 20,000 people, who stay an average of eight days

■ ER is busiest in B.C. with 70,000 visits per year

■ construction scheduled to begin in 2008 on a new Outpatient Hospital to help decrease congestion at SMH

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