

Risk Management Considerations in Surgical Practice

Surgical providers face various risks in day-to-day practice. Medical errors, adverse outcomes, and near-misses can result from issues related to technical skill, clinical judgment, communication, documentation, clinical systems, and more. The following checklist provides high-level considerations for reducing these risks and improving patient safety in surgical practice.

	Yes	No
<i>Communication</i>		
Do you provide patients with pertinent information, such as practice policies, patient rights and responsibilities, medication refill policies, work-related restrictions, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you actively listen to patients without interrupting and repeat information to clarify meaning and reinforce understanding?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use layman's terms and avoid jargon when talking to patients about procedures, treatment plans, anticipated benefits, potential risks, and alternative therapies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you adhere to a comprehensive informed consent process that includes verbal and written patient education?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you provide patients with educational materials that are written in plain language and include explanations of medical terms and visual aids to support comprehension?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use a technique such as teach-back to ensure patients understand informed consent discussions and their proposed treatment plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Communication (continued)		
Do you use interpreting services and assistive technologies for patients who have communication barriers?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you using acceptable interpreting services, such as bilingual healthcare providers or staff members, staff trained as interpreters, onsite trained medical interpreters, or telephone or video medical interpreting services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you established best practices for working with medical interpreters in the clinical settings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you actively communicate and collaborate with the clinical teams providing patient care (e.g., primary care physicians, other consultants, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diagnosis		
Do you perform a complete assessment for each patient, including establishing a differential diagnosis and considering appropriate diagnostic testing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you include the worst-case scenario as part of your differential diagnosis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you implement and utilize clinical pathways to standardize processes and support quality care?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered using clinical decision support systems, diagnostic timeouts, consultations, and/or group decision-making to support clinical reasoning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you ensure timely ordering of tests and consults to prevent problems associated with ruling out or documenting abnormal findings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you review all diagnostic test results and consultative reports prior to filing them in patient records?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are high-risk patients systematically tracked to avoid failures in follow-up and diagnosis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Healthcare practices that receive federal financial assistance and/or funding are generally responsible for providing auxiliary aids or other service accommodations at no cost to the patient. Be cognizant of state and federal laws that apply to accommodating these patient communities.

	Yes	No
<i>Diagnosis (continued)</i>		
Do you carefully consider repeated patient complaints or concerns when making clinical decisions about patient care and additional diagnostic testing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you cognizant of the types of cognitive errors that can lead to lapses in clinical judgment and subsequent diagnostic errors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Treatment/Surgery</i>		
Do you conduct a thorough preprocedure screening of patients for risk factors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you follow evidence-based guidelines specific to your specialty?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you ensure that all appropriate health information for each patient is available prior to the start of a procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are necessary equipment and supplies inventoried and verified prior to the start of a procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are infection prevention and control best practices used to maintain the sterile field and prevent surgical site infections ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patient safety precautions utilized during each procedure (e.g., proper positioning)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you and your surgical team participate in a timeout before each procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does anesthesia monitoring occur throughout each procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you and your surgical team communicate about patient status throughout each procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are strategies in place to minimize communication breakdowns and encourage team members to speak up about safety concerns?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are strategies in place to manage noise and distractions in the operating room?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a qualified healthcare provider immediately available during each patient's recovery period?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you maintain a consistent postprocedure assessment process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Treatment/Surgery (continued)		
Are patients appropriately monitored following procedures (e.g., vital signs, airway, mental status, pain, hydration, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patients evaluated against discharge criteria prior to discharge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are patients and families/caregivers provided with appropriate education and instructions prior to discharge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do patients receive a postdischarge follow-up call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation		
Do you follow organizational timeframes for completing documentation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does each patient’s health record contain thorough information, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History and physical? • Current medications? • Nonpharmacological interventions? • Allergies? • Pain assessments? • Test results? • Consults/referrals and related reports? • Treatment goals? • Preoperative screening results? 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you document the clinical decision-making process, treatment rationale, and follow-up plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you document all calls and electronic communications related to clinical care?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you document the informed consent process, including discussion of risks, benefits, and alternative treatment options (as well as the provision of educational materials)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Documentation (continued)		
Are informed consent forms (if applicable) maintained as part of patient records?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are required preoperative data documented and available at the time of surgery scheduling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you complete a detailed operative report the day of each procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you document all instances of patient nonadherence as they occur as well as any education provided to patients and families/caregivers regarding the consequences of not following the treatment regimen?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical Systems		
Does your organization systematically track diagnostic and consultative referrals from inception of the order until receipt and signoff of results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have test-tracking safeguards in place to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests are scheduled and completed? • Test results are received? • Test results are reviewed by the ordering clinician? • Patient are notified in established and appropriate timeframes? • Test results are filed in patient records? • Decisions about care are documented? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are phone calls related to clinical care triaged by a clinician or through use of a written algorithm?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members receive adequate training on clinical systems at hire and when systems change?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization include review of clinical systems and administrative functions as part of quality improvement initiatives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Training and Performance Improvement		
Does your organization adhere to credentialing and privileging policies, including evaluation of procedural skills and competency with equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you participate in peer review activities to improve performance and quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you continue to enhance your technical surgical skills and communication skills through continuing education?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization routinely evaluate quality indicators and implement performance improvement plans to reduce patient risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization ensure that staff and provider training is consistent with roles and responsibilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do providers and staff members in your organization receive appropriate training on new or upgraded systems and technologies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Resource

For additional information about safety and risk management in surgical practice, see MedPro’s [Risk Resources: Anesthesia & Surgery](#).

This document does not constitute legal or medical advice and should not be construed as rules or establishing a standard of care. Because the facts applicable to your situation may vary, or the laws applicable in your jurisdiction may differ, please contact your attorney or other professional advisors if you have any questions related to your legal or medical obligations or rights, state or federal laws, contract interpretation, or other legal questions.

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