

Safe Surgery Saves Lives: The Second Global Patient Safety Challenge¹

Safe Surgery Saves Lives Launch Event

The World Alliance for Patient Safety initiated work on the second Global Patient Safety Challenge in January 2007. The initiative, “Safe Surgery Saves Lives”, aims to improve the safety of surgical care around the world. By focusing attention on surgery as a public health issue, the WHO is recognizing the importance of improving the safety of surgical care in all Member States.

Major surgery occurs at a volume exceeding the amount of child birth worldwide, yet is much more dangerous and has a much higher mortality rate. The incidence of traumatic injuries, cancers, and other surgical conditions is rising as a proportion of the total global burden of disease, and surgical intervention is expected to increase around the world. Surgical care and its safe delivery can potentially affect the lives of millions of people worldwide. By defining a core set of minimum standards that can be applied universally across borders and settings, the Safe Surgery Saves Lives Challenge hopes to create an environment of safety that will help improve both access to and care of surgical patients.

Working groups comprised of experts and clinicians with experience in a broad range of health care settings have been reviewing the evidence for improving safety in surgery. They are now completing work on a set of basic practice standards for perioperative care. The goal will be to improve surgical outcomes for patients regardless of circumstance or environment. Each working group has been focusing on a particular area for improvement in perioperative care: Surgical Site Infection Prevention, Safe Anaesthesia, Safe Surgical Teams, and Measurement of Surgical Care and Quality Assurance Mechanisms.

The final product will be a Surgical Safety Checklist that can be used by practitioners interested in promoting safety and improving quality of surgical services. The checklist is designed to be simple and widely applicable. It aims to reinforce established safety practices, and many of the steps are already accepted as routine in facilities around the world. It also aims to foster better communication and teamwork among clinical disciplines. The checklist is intended as a tool for use by clinicians interested in improving the safety of their operations and reducing unnecessary surgical deaths and complications. The individual safety checks have been included based on clinical evidence or expert opinion that their inclusion will reduce the likelihood of serious, avoidable surgical harm and that adherence to it is unlikely to introduce injury or unmanageable cost.

¹Available from URL: <http://www.who.int/patientsafety/challenge/safe.surgery/en/index.html> (URL accessed on June 4, 2008).

On June 25, 2008, the World Health Organization's *Safe Surgery Saves Lives* initiative will be formally launched at a major event to be held at the WHO Regional Office for the Americas (AMRO/PAHO) in Washington DC, USA. This event will be hosted by Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, WHO Regional Director for the Americas and attended by several Ministers of Health, world experts in surgery, anaesthesiology, nursing and leading representatives of health care associations. The event will video-link with numerous professional associations around the world.

Keynote speakers will include Dr. Atul Gawande, leader of the *Safe Surgery Saves Lives* project, Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer for England and Chair of the WHO World Alliance for Patient Safety, as well as representatives of organizations endorsing the concept of a "WHO Surgical Safety Checklist" as a tool for surgical teams around the world, to ensure that patients undergo the right operation at the correct body site, with safe anaesthesia, established infection prevention measures and effective teamwork for safer care.

The objectives of the *Safe Surgery Saves Lives* launch event are to:

- generate global awareness of the importance of this WHO initiative;
- publicize the "WHO Surgical Safety Checklist" as a means to ensuring safer care;
- remind the world that concrete efforts for safer surgery will contribute to patient safety.

The problem

Surgical care has been an essential component of health care worldwide for a century, but its recent, rapid growth is now having major public health consequences. Annually, an estimated 230 million major operations are performed around the world – one for every 25 human beings on earth. There are almost twice as many operations done globally as child deliveries, and at far higher risk than child birth. Major complication rates range from 3–16%, and death rates from 0.2–10%, depending on the setting, translating into at least 7 million disabling complications and 1 million deaths each year. At least half of these are recognized to be avoidable, if basic standards of care were more consistently followed in developed and developing countries.

The response

The new *Safe Surgery Saves Lives* initiative provides strategies and tools for reducing the rising incidence of deaths and complications from surgery worldwide which involve:

- (1) engaging professional endorsement for safer surgical care,
- (2) establishing a "WHO Surgical Safety Checklist",
- (3) defining measures for better tracking of surgical volume and mortality.

At the launch event, the Alliance will announce the endorsements received from professional associations and societies supporting the "WHO Surgical Safety Checklist". No regional or country launch events are anticipated to take place during the implementation period of this initiative and professional society endorsements will be publicized through the *Safe Surgery Saves Lives* website.