

Patient Involvement Leads to Safer Surgery in New Mexico

By Patricia Gonzalez, BUS, NMMRA Quality Improvement Coordinator

As part of efforts to make surgery safer across the country, the Surgical Care Improvement Project (SCIP) partnership recently announced that increased emphasis is being placed on informing consumers about issues surrounding surgery safety and involving patients more directly in the surgery care they receive. This is in addition to the partnership's ongoing work with hospitals and other health care providers.

More than 40 million operations are performed in the United States each year, many of them complicated by infection, blood clots, and heart problems, among other adverse events. New Mexico hospitals perform over 32,000 major surgical procedures annually on Medicare patients. Surgical complications take a toll not only on the patients, but also on the overall cost of health care in New Mexico and across the country. However, a significant percentage of these complications are preventable. The goal of the SCIP initiative is to reduce preventable surgical complications nationwide by 25 percent by 2010 using proven clinical approaches.

Efforts combine the expertise of key health care organizations with steps now underway to include patients and other consumers in improving the care they receive. This combined approach may improve surgical results (or outcomes) in New Mexico.

Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces is partnering with the New Mexico Medical Review Association (NMMRA), along with other hospitals across the state – Heart Hospital of New Mexico, Lovelace Medical Center-Downtown, Lovelace Westside Hospital, Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital, San Juan Regional Medical Center, St. Vincent's Regional Medical Center and the University of New Mexico Hospital – in an effort to bring about change that may improve surgical outcomes in their hospitals. NMMRA – this state's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO), is working in concert with hospital staff and their leaders to apply care processes that are based on proven evidence to help make surgery safer and reduce the likelihood of patient harm.

Meaningful reduction in surgical complications requires that surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, pharmacists, infection control professionals, hospital executives and patients work together to achieve better surgical care results.

"There is strong evidence that patient involvement can significantly improve health care outcomes. When patients adopt a participative approach by becoming involved in their own care, we know the outcome is better," say Bruce San Filippo, MD, chief medical officer at Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces. "Therefore, we are providing education packets to our patients with information on several aspects of patient safety including surgical care safety."

To spur consumer involvement, NMMRA has developed this helpful tool that provides specific questions patients can ask their physicians and nurses before surgery to enable them to take an active part in their own care and work with their physicians in an effort to improve surgical outcomes in New Mexico. Hopefully, this will help reduce the risk of complications. Consumers are encouraged to clip this information to take with them when meeting with their doctor or hospital prior to their surgery. The questions can be used to discuss what is expected to occur before and during surgery, during the hospital stay, and how they as patients can take an active part.



What You Can Do to Make Surgery Safer

Talk to your surgical team.

You can help lower your risk for problems from your surgery by talking with a member of your surgical care team before surgery about the type of care

you should receive. Your care team includes your surgeon, your anesthesiologist and your nurses. Before your surgery, ask your doctor (or who ever can best answer) these questions.



To avoid infection ask -

If I need antibiotics before surgery, when will I receive the antibiotic and for how long?

Antibiotics should be given within 60 minutes before surgery and should be stopped within 24 hours in most cases. Given properly, antibiotics can greatly lower your chances of getting an infection.

If hair needs to be removed from the part of my body that is having surgery, what will you use?

Clippers should be used to remove hair at the site of your surgery. Using a razor before surgery can cause infections because of the risk of leaving small cuts on the skin.

To avoid blood clots ask -

What will you do to prevent blood clots?

Blood clots can lead to heart attacks and strokes. During surgery, you are at risk of getting blood clots because you do not move. The more complicated your surgery, the higher your risk. Talk to your doctor about your risk for blood clots and steps that will help prevent them, such as giving you the right medicine before surgery.

To avoid heart attacks ask -

If I take medicine for heart disease, should I keep taking it?

Taking certain medicines together can cause problems. Tell your doctor about all the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter things like aspirin and herbal remedies. Your doctor will tell you which medicines you should and should not be taking before surgery.

New Mexico Medical Review Association



Additional hospital care information and resources are available on NMMRA's Web site at www.nmmra.org/beneficiaries/info_hospital.php, including *Tips for Safer Surgery* and *What You Need to Know About Infections After Surgery*. This fact sheet, provided in English and Spanish, was prepared by NMMRA in participation with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's national campaign that first set out to prevent avoidable patient deaths and is now expanding efforts to protect patients from harm. Also available are *Questions to Ask Your Pharmacist About Your Medications* and *Questions to Ask Your Doctor BEFORE You Have Surgery*, a tool that provides patients with space to jot down answers to important questions when visiting their doctor.

SCIP is one of the first national quality improvement initiatives to unite hospitals, physician and nursing organizations, the federal government, organizations that accredit hospitals and now consumer advocacy groups in far-reaching surgical quality improvement efforts. Increasingly, the organizations that help ensure safe care for patients are also now recognizing that patients themselves have an important role in making sure the care they receive is the best and safest it can be.

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