Ensuring consistent time-out in a system

To ensure consistency for its 3 campuses, the UMass Memorial Medical Center, a 743-bed Level I trauma center and teaching hospital of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Worcester, has implemented a systemwide procedure for its time-out process for surgical site verification. The campuses include a 9-OR ambulatory surgery center and 2 inpatient campuses with a total of 40 ORs. The process includes a policy and checklist that apply to all areas where patients have invasive procedures.

We found practitioners had different understandings of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations’s Universal Protocol for site verification, which resulted in variation in practice and compliance. With the need to ensure patient safety and continuous readiness for Joint Commission surveys, it was critical to communicate and implement the protocol requirements.

The checklist is a 1-page, 1-sided form used to document the final safety pause/time-out conducted by the entire surgical team just prior to the start of the procedure. The checklist is completed by the circulating RN and becomes part of the patient’s permanent medical record. The intraoperative electronic record clearly defines the necessary fields for completion (illustration).

The policy and process were communicated to all practitioners on laminated cards (illustration) at multiple medical staff meetings and at unit-based staff meetings.

To monitor compliance, managers perform retrospective chart audits, and the medical record department performs concurrent reviews. Findings are sent to the medical center’s senior leadership, with the expectation that the data will be shared with involved departments.

This series of checks and balances provides systems and policies that improve work processes and enhance patient safety.

In a survey by the Joint Commission in July 2005, the surveyors had positive comments about our process and checklist.

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The UMass Universal Protocol policy and checklist are in the OR Manager Toolbox at www.ormanager.com.
The Universal Protocol is part of the intraoperative electronic record at UMass Memorial Medical Center.

**Laminated cue card**

**Universal Protocol to eliminate wrong-patient, wrong-side, wrong-site surgery**

Prior to any procedure (except phlebotomy, peripheral IV catheter, Foley catheterization, or nasogastric tube placement), inpatient or outpatient:

**Do:** Verify the patient’s identification using 2 unique patient identifiers.

**Do:** The physician performing the procedure marks the site with his/her initials with a permanent marker that is visible after the skin prep and drape are applied for any procedure that involves laterality, multiple structures, or multiple levels. (See policy for exclusions.)

**Do:** Prior to the start of the procedure, a time-out is performed. The time-out requires active, verbal communication by the procedure team to confirm the correct patient, site and side, agreement on the procedure, correct patient position, and the availability of correct equipment and/or implants.

**Do:** The time-out is performed for all invasive procedures except in an emergency if the risks outweigh the benefits.

**Do:** The time-out is documented in the written or dictated procedure note.

*Source: UMass Memorial Medical Center, Worcester.*