What ORs can learn from the cockpit

Two surgeons and a pilot meet, interestingly, on an airplane. They begin comparing notes. They learn that the OR and the cockpit have a lot in common—both are intense, high-stakes environments. And both are vulnerable to potentially disastrous communication breakdowns.

The surgeons invite the pilot to meet with other surgeon leaders. Thus is born a collaboration between the American College of Surgeons (ACS), led by its president Gerald Healy, MD, FACS, an advocate for team training, and MachOne Leadership, a Miami-based company that provides education in leadership and team communication.

MachOne’s CEO, Jack Barker, PhD, a long-time pilot and former professor at the Air Force Academy, has a doctorate in cognitive psychology and has studied high performance teams for the Air Force and NASA.

As part of the collaboration with ACS, Barker and his colleagues have presented sessions at the ACS Clinical Congress and other educational forums.

Barker will bring the same training to the OR Manager audience at an all-day seminar titled High Performance Teams, Crew Resource Management in the OR on Wednesday, Oct 29, during the Managing Today’s OR Suite Conference to be held Oct 29 to 31 in Washington, DC. The seminar is one of 8 all-day sessions to be held Oct 29.

Though there are obvious differences between the cockpit and OR, there are also notable similarities.

“We both use standard protocols—what airlines call standard operating procedures—that are based on good historical data,” Barker says. “And when you do a root cause analysis after an error, you often find the error was a result of not following the protocol.”

There used to be a culture where pilots or surgeons and the others they work with weren’t taught to function as a team.

Other obstacles in health care are the lack of a reporting system for errors, in part because of legal issues, which inhibits learning about errors and their causes, and a lack of top leadership support for building a team culture.

Surgeons positive

Surgeons’ reaction to the training has been “surprisingly positive,” Barker says. He says it’s not much different than when crew resource management was introduced to airline captains.

“At first, some captains walked out of the training, saying they didn’t need it,” he notes. Later, some of them became its biggest supporters.

During the seminar, Barker will present take-home skills, including communication tools and techniques, how to advocate skillfully, how to use inquiry to aid communication, and effective use of briefings and checklists.

“The data show a really good briefing helps reduce errors and helps the system be more effective,” Barker says.

Download the brochure and register online at www.ormanager.com.
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