

Checklist Case Example: Surgical Safety Checklist by Newnham Court Equine

Name of initiative: Surgical Safety Checklist
Initiative start date: November 2018
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Introduction

Newnham Court Equine is an RCVS accredited independent general equine practice based in Kent. The history of the practice spans over 100 years and currently employs seven veterinary surgeons and 13 nursing and office team members. Our aim is to provide our clients and their horses, ponies and donkeys with the highest standards of care through the continuing development of our clinical performance. The implementation of quality improvement (QI) is a strategy adopted by the practice in 2018 after recognising the positive benefits associated with QI in other industries. We now use QI to not only identify what are our strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of care to our patients, but also to inform us of the action to take on the things that we could do better.

Training as a midwife in the National Health Service (NHS) exposed our registered equine nurse (REVN) to many examples of QI methods and tools. The use of a safe surgery checklist was used for all surgical procedures and its use promoted not only surgical and anaesthesia safety but also a safe surgical team. Historically, communication amongst surgical teams can be compromised by organisation culture with some members of the team feeling that they are unable to speak up or challenge more senior colleagues. Communication is a key area where omissions and mistakes can be made, particularly in high-stress situations. In the same manner as the NHS, our practice supports training of nurses, veterinary students and graduate training and we identified that often during surgery we have an extended team comprising of trained, and also less experienced team members undergoing training. We decided to implement a modified safe surgery checklist based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) checklist to not only reduce error in surgery but to also improve processes, communication and teamwork.

Aims

Implementation of the safe surgery checklist was discussed at a practice meeting. We aimed to engage all the team and encourage them to embrace to use of the checklist but to also understand the purpose of QI in our practice and the wider veterinary field. A modified safe surgery checklist, adapted from the WHO safe surgery checklist, was introduced, and its use was recommended for all patients undergoing a surgical procedure. A review of the literature did not reveal a benchmark for the use of safe surgery checklists in equine practice therefore a goal of significant sustained improvement was set.

Actions

To measure our ongoing performance and the engagement of our clinical team, we performed a clinical audit of the use of safe surgery checklists between November 2018 and November 2019 using RCVS Knowledge resources. For ease of use, the safe surgery checklists were made available in each of the treatment areas and the surgical suite. The lead nurse for the procedure was responsible for initiating the checklist at the beginning of the procedure and prompting the other team members to perform their parts of the checklist.

Following the completion of the case, the checklist was then attached to the patient's clinical notes. A search of the practice management system was used to identify all patients that had a general anaesthetic or a standing surgical procedure between November 2018 and November 2019. Clinical notes for these cases were examined and the safe surgery checklist found were included in the clinical audit.

Results

Of the surgical cases performed during the audit period, safe surgery checklists were used in 35% of cases. Of the safe surgery checklists found, only 13% were completed fully. We observed that the sign-in section (section 1) was completed most fully and the time out section (section 2) was the weakest area for completion. Future plans include nominating a checklist champion, performing regular clinical audits and continuing to embed our practice culture of continuous improvement.

Impact of intervention

Introduction of QI in our practice was novel. Our positive practice culture and openness to continuous improvement allowed us to enable our team to engage with the QI process. According to WHO (2019), one of the main goals of the safe surgery checklist is to improve teamwork and communication. Since the implementation of the safe surgery checklist in our practice, 100% of our veterinary surgeons and nurses reported that the safe surgery checklist is an important tool in surgical safety. Feedback from the team showed that they recognised the benefits of improving teamwork and communicating critical information during surgical procedures to improve patient safety.

Analysis of the audit results demonstrates an improvement in the use of the safe surgery checklist in our practice. The audit results showed that although our team reported that they are engaged with the QI, checklists were completed for only 35% of surgical cases. Analysis of the data also identified marked inconsistencies in the completion of the checklist, both concerning the number of cases in which the checklist is used but also the percentage of the checklist completed. Further research and discussion with the practice team is required to understand the barriers that may prevent team members from completing the checklist. Our plan is to implement change and our target for safe surgery checklist completion will be 100% going forward. We will aim to achieve this by:

- dissemination of the audit results to all team members at a practice meeting,
- training on QI and checklist use to increase knowledge and understanding,
- nominating a checklist champion to continue to engage the team and monitor checklist use,
- creating a system for efficient extraction of relevant data from the PMS,
- performing a re-audit in 3 months.

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