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Audio Headsets – the missing piece of the OR Jigsaw.

There is no room for communication error within the Operating Room (OR). For multi-disciplinary teams working over extended periods across control and prep areas as well as the OR, using imaging and robotics, one misunderstood request or instruction can have serious consequences. **Here, two leading orthopaedic surgeons, David Sweetnam at the Schoen Clinic in Central London and Paul Harnett at Kings College & Orpington in South London, share how their teams are benefiting from wireless headsets during their OR procedures.**

Safety Miscommunication

The quality of communication within the Operating Room (OR) has a direct implication on risk, safety and patient well-being. As recent analysis into NHS Never Events across England revealed, it can be easy to mishear critical information being passed between OR staff before and during procedures, which is a source of concern and is flagged up more and more in a range of OR types and layouts. How can a surgeon ensure everyone within a multi-

disciplinary team - including a lead surgeon, registrar, anaesthetist, radiographer, surgeon's assistant, scrub nurse, and equipment runner – is fully engaged throughout an extended period? How can all the team members – many of whom might experience reduced communication as a result of using protective isolation suits or be in different parts of the OR – be confident that they have heard accurately at the table or when moving between the OR, prep rooms and equipment stores?



Paul Harnett, Consultant Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgeon at Kings College Hospital and Orpington Hospital is among of a growing body of surgeons using audio headsets within the OR to ensure every team member can communicate effectively throughout a procedure. The wearing of protective isolation suits by surgeons has highlighted the issue in orthopaedic suites.

Harnett explains, *“In the operating room good communication is key to successful outcomes. Basic safety and getting the best performance from the team is critical, especially during long complex cases.”*

With eight or more people involved in every procedure working at a distance: three around the table, the anaesthetist at their own workstation, runners and other prep staff often in other rooms, keeping everyone fully informed is not easy.

Using a single channel, lightweight headsets provide high quality, effective communication where every team member is part of the process, with ready acknowledgement and confirmation of information and instruction.

Harnett confirms: *“Audio headsets make a significant improvement in communicating to everyone involved. We all feel more like a team.”*

Right First Time

Moreover, with the increasing use of sophisticated technology within the OR, team members face new communication challenges. In addition to the use of restrictive isolation suits in orthopaedic procedures, EP & Cath Labs and robotics are creating new demands for effective interaction between multi-skilled teams.

David Sweetnam, Senior Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Schoen Clinic in London W1

who now uses headsets during his procedures where protective suits are worn comments: *"It is essential that all staff are aware of the decisions being made – and that interruptions are kept to a minimum."*



Everyone working on a complex procedure gets into a rhythm; if we have to stop – perhaps to repeat what has been said, turn around to speak with people or we're delayed because a revised instruction to the runner wasn't heard – it can be incredibly frustrating. Headsets improve the process: there is no need to repeat instructions or clarify requests. Everyone can hear exactly what has been said first time."

Linking up every team member via headsets improves collaboration. It enables effective, unambiguous speech between multiple specialists.

"Headsets support student training because they can hear everything that's going on and what's being said by the surgical team. Wearing headsets enables them to take part and get involved, joining the conversation".

As Sweetnam concludes, *"Headsets are the missing part of the jigsaw in ORs."*

Isn't it time headsets became a standard component of the OR set-up?

