

Operating Department Practitioners' (ODP) Experiences of Leadership in a Surgical Multi Professional Team

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Background

Operating department practitioners (ODPs) have opportunities to develop into the role of surgical first assistant, surgical care practitioner and anaesthesia associate. The skills that ODPs have are not only transferable into diverse clinical roles but have transferability into acute and critical care environments including intensive care, high dependency and accident and emergency units. There is a dearth of literature relating to ODPs, the literature reviewed for this study was largely descriptive, anecdotal, and focused on doctors and nurses in operating theatres rather than ODPs.

Aim

Undertake an exploration of ODPs' experiences of leadership with a view to understanding what factors enable or inhibit them to be effective leaders in theatres.

Method

11 ODPs from agenda for change bands five-eight, from four hospitals in two NHS trusts participated in the research. Data collection took the form of recorded semi structured interviews which were then transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and draw key findings.

Results

Factors that enabled and inhibited ODPs to be effective leaders included the ability to speak up and challenge. The confidence to speak up is strengthened with experience; however challenging authority is broached with trepidation.

It's quite a stressful atmosphere. So, you really need to be able to stand up and back your decisions. Obviously, you have your evidence-based practice, but to back your decisions, look at your rationale, and it's got to be sensible. Bravery I think is required more than anything.

Emily

These concepts were applied to patient safety with a focus on psychological safety and creating a climate for speaking up. Psychological safety creates socially constructed learning opportunities having both positive and negative consequences.

If I'm coordinating in the department, ODPs will always come to me, and I'll support them in the decisions to make sure they make the right decisions and explain why. I think it's about being knowledgeable and being able to answer questions when people come to you and to guide them in the right way.

Sally

The power of professional hierarchies can affect psychological safety, consequentially impacting on patient safety. Challenging others was described as a positive leadership behaviour and related to where ODPs were in the organisational hierarchy, but also to the culture created in theatres and the professions therein.

We have to challenge sometimes, and we always talk about being patients' advocate and some people with less experience are not much in the leadership mould; they won't challenge.

Bryan

It's apparent that psychological safety impacts on the ability of some staff to speak up, it also reveals there is a culture whereby poor practice is observed and accepted.

I think a lot of people are afraid to challenge the surgeons, afraid to challenge the anaesthetists and just carry on when they are not in the room because they didn't want to go and get them, they don't want to get into any trouble.

Molly

There is evidence that not speaking up is related to status of staff, often those of lower status, being fearful of speaking up.

I think some people still have that old-fashioned view of them really. I suppose that they think that they (Surgeons and anaesthetists) can't be challenged.

Molly

Conclusion

ODPs develop as leaders in the NHS through social interaction and situated learning in the form of communities of practice, psychological safety, and team construct.

New Knowledge

This research has made a positive knowledge contribution to the operating department practitioner profession and the surgical team.

- A model of IPE is required to support ODPs to speak up to improve patient safety.
- Positive ODP role models in senior positions generate opportunities for personal and professional development which inspires progression.
- ODPs develop as leaders through social interaction and situated learning.
- It was found that the confidence to speak up is strengthened with experience; however challenging authority is broached with trepidation.