

Evaluating and Improving Healthcare Staff Knowledge of the [NG179] NICE Guidelines on Elective Surgical Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Quality Improvement Project

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Abstract : The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic saw several countries issue guidance postponing all non-urgent diagnostic evaluations and operations, leading to an estimated backlog of 28 million cases worldwide and over 4 million in the UK alone. In an attempt to regulate the resumption of elective surgical activity, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) introduced the 'COVID-19 rapid guideline [NG179]'. This project aimed to increase healthcare staff knowledge of the aforementioned guideline to a targeted score of 100% in the disseminated questionnaire within 3 months at the Royal Free Hospital. A standardized online questionnaire was used to assess the knowledge of surgical and medical staff at baseline and following each 4-week-long Plan-Study-Do-Act (PDSA) cycle. During PDSA1, the A4 visual summary accompanying the guideline was visibly placed in all relevant clinical areas and the full guideline was distributed to the staff in charge together with a short briefing on the salient points. PDSA2 involved brief small-group teaching sessions. A total of 218 responses was collected. Mean percentage scores increased significantly from $51\pm 19\%$ at baseline to $81\pm 16\%$ after PDSA1 ($t=10.32$, $p<0.0001$) and further to $93\pm 8\%$ after PDSA2 ($t=4.9$, $p<0.0001$), with 54% of participants achieving a perfect score. In conclusion, the targeted distribution of guideline printouts and visual aids, combined with small-group teaching sessions, were simple and effective ways of educating healthcare staff about the new standards of elective surgical care at the time of COVID-19. This could facilitate the safe restoration of surgical activity, which is critical in order to mitigate the far-reaching consequences of surgical delays on an unprecedented scale during a time of great crisis and uncertainty.

Keywords : COVID-19, elective surgery, NICE guidelines, quality improvement

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