

Elements of Critical Event Management: A Qualitative Study of Trauma Teams

Authors : Tan Xin Zhong Timothy, Chang Chen Jie Victor, Yew Kwan Tong, Lim Geok Peng Sandy

Abstract : Background: Leaders in crisis response teams such as Trauma Teams in hospitals are essential to the effective coordination and direction of the team. The response to emergency trauma situations must be accurate, rapid, and well executed. To this end, the team leader's social, technical and leadership skills are essential factors that implicate the success of an emergency trauma intervention. While each emergency trauma case varies in severity and complexity, and the experience and expertise of team leaders may vary, it would be productive to identify certain coordinative and directive functions that improve the capacity for leading a team. Methods: This qualitative study of Trauma Team physicians in Singapore General Hospital (SGH) involved 50 in-depth interviews with doctors and nurses involved in Trauma Team activations, observations of Trauma Teams managing emergency patients, and reviews of audio/video recordings of 65 trauma activations. The interviews were conducted with doctors of various ranks across the relevant departments, 12 from the Emergency Department (ED), 11 from General Surgery (GS) and 8 from Orthopaedics, while the 6 nurses were from ED. In accordance with the grounded theory approach, the content of the interviews was coded and analysed in order to derive broad leadership themes that corresponded with certain behavioural traits exhibited by trauma team leaders, supplemented with the observational and audio/video data. Results: The leadership behaviours of the team leaders could be typified into three broad categories: team orientation, engagement and activeness. Team orientation corresponds with the source and form of cognitive responsibility, decision-making and informational contributions, divisible into individualistic and consultative sub-categories. Engagement refers to the type of activity that leaders prefer to engage in, and which implicates their attentional focus, divisible into participatory and supervisory sub-categories. Activeness is a function of the leader's attitudes towards the behavioural regulation of the team, which manifests in inactivity or activity to augment or merely align with protocol. These factors are not exhaustive and are contextually sensitive, but collectively implicate a significant portion of the leadership activity observed in trauma teams.

Keywords : trauma team activations, critical event management, leadership, teamwork

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