



Reducing Operating Room Noise: Creating Awareness and Taking Action

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SITUATION: Noise levels in the operating room (OR) can cause **patient care distractions, impair hearing and team communication, delay the ability to notice alarms**, and contribute to rising anxiety and diminished well-being among providers, thereby negatively impacting patient safety. ¹⁻⁴

BACKGROUND: Safe anesthesia care requires managing the work environment to minimize or eliminate distractions that reduce appropriate attention to the patient. ⁵

ASSESSMENT: The Society for Pediatric Anesthesia (SPA) Quality and Safety Committee formed the **Noise in the Operating Room (NOR) Task Force** to explore noise perceptions, pinpoint contributing factors, and inform actionable change.

- **NOR Survey of SPA Members¹:** Results support the perception that loud noise in the OR occurs at unacceptable levels across the US, causing distractions and contributing to an unsafe patient care environment.
 - Distractions can be perceived differently depending on gender, years of practice, and setting.
 - Talking and music were the most reported noise sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Proposed Strategies to Decrease OR Noise Levels¹

Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowering everyone to ask for quiet ● Commitment from every intraoperative team member ● Minimize any conversation not related to the patient ● Minimize non-essential OR traffic
System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase institutional awareness and create institutional guidelines on NOR ● “No noise time” to prohibit non-essential activities during critical periods ● Complete institutional quality improvement initiatives^{2,3} ● Visual and/or audible alerts of excessive noise (decibel meter alarms) ● Pause music during critical periods (especially induction/emergence of anesthesia)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● OR staff education and new OR staff orientation
Research/ Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Architectural, engineering, design - OR changes to improve sound absorption ● Creating working environments to optimize focus and communication

References:

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