

Sign of the times : Be careful what you say in the Operating room

Dear Sir,

Whilst performing the last checks on pressure points, for the safe positioning of our anaesthetised patient for radical nephrectomy, the anaesthetist noticed a small object tucked underneath the patients TED stockings, just above his ankle. Initially it looked like a USB key device, but closer inspection revealed tiny printed letters spelling 'mic', a small red light and a tiny switch which was turned 'on'. It took a few moments for the realisation of what this device was and its intended purpose to dawn on us.

We refer to the recent court case in Vienna, Virginia, where a patient recorded on his iPhone derogatory remarks made by his anaesthesiologist and medical care team while he was anaesthetised for his colonoscopy. The patient was awarded \$500,000 for defamation and medical malpractice.

Putting aside the inappropriateness of a concealed recording device in this setting, our particular case raised several major concerns. First, there is an important issue of patient safety with potential for pressure sore development, diathermy burns and interference with monitoring equipment. Second, the equally key issue of patient confidentiality as the device may have inadvertently recorded medical staff discussions regarding other patients. Third, the personal rights of the medical staff to have private conversations during a theatre case. Indeed, it would make for a very monotonous working environment if all communication during a theatre case to be strictly of a professional capacity and only relating to the patient concerned. We wholeheartedly maintain that free-flowing banter at appropriate times makes for a cohesive, happy and thus effective theatre team.

The overwhelming feeling in the theatre room after the discovery was of violation and sadness with the acknowledgment that the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship is threatened and weakened by rare incidences such as these.

We may never know the real intention of our particular patient. Voyeuristic, journalistic, malicious? What is absolute clear, is the plethora of sophisticated recording devices widely available which would not look out of place in the latest 'Spectre' Bond film. We have now been advised to ask patients at the pre-op check to not only remove jewellery and metal, but also recording devices and to explain the rationale behind this request.

So it is a sign of the times, that with a heavy heart we would like to advise all our colleagues to exercise caution, and be extremely careful what you say in the operating room.