

ER Clinicians Benefit From Mental Rehearsal of Trauma Scenarios



The fast-paced environment of trauma resuscitation demands that team members understand their responsibilities before patients enter the hospital, and continuously communicate with each other while delivering care. A study of mental mapping on trauma teams shows the benefits of rehearsing possible scenarios in order to minimise stress and ensure that medical teams, which sometimes include up to a dozen clinicians, work together effectively.

"Mental practice appears to help establish common team goals, set priorities and maintain situation awareness in advance so teams can be prepared for even the most complex and challenging trauma resuscitation," said Dr. Chris Hicks, an emergency physician and leader of the trauma team at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, Canada. "We're borrowing principles from performance athletes, musicians and even the military, to help guide clinicians during high-stress, challenging situations."

Two groups comprised of teams of anaesthesiology and emergency or general surgery residents participated in the study. The control group received technical trauma training, while the other group practiced 20 minutes of quiet mental rehearsal of a trauma scenario. They were asked to visualise the situation and think about how they would act and function together while managing a patient. A script with guiding questions was provided, and team members were free to discuss the script with one another.

Following the training session, the two groups participated in a simulated trauma situation that mimicked what might happen in reality. The results showed that the team that had gone through the mental practice experienced improved communication and enhanced team behaviour compared to the control group. According to Dr. Hicks, who led the research project, it is the first study which has demonstrated the positive effect of mental rehearsal in trauma care.

"We know that the most consequential mistakes in medicine are not technical or procedural, but non-technical in nature -- errors in communication, leadership, role clarity, resource utilisation," explained Dr. Hicks. "Mental practice improves team-based skills and performance, and can improve patient safety and reduce important medical errors."

The research has been published online in the *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine*.

Source: [St. Michael's Hospital](#)

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