

observation case, it has, as Bill Gates foretold, magnified the inefficiencies in our communication.

In this very interesting study that quintessentially focused on team member engagement (referred to as "synergy" by the authors), the investigators examined the impact of a wireless, hands-free audio system on verbal communication within a simulated OR environment. Participants were placed in their traditional OR locations. Prerecorded sounds were taken from a live procedure, combined with music and used as background noise. Surgical phrases were spoken by a Da Vinci Si console surgeon and expressed via the external Da Vinci Si speakers or through wireless headsets worn by the assistant robotic console surgeon, bedside assistant, circulating nurse, and anesthesiologist. The authors found that the wireless, hands-free system increased the accuracy of communication when compared with the conventional external Da Vinci Si speakers. They concluded that a wireless audio communication system may significantly improve communication among the surgical team and by doing so may avoid inefficiencies and improve patient safety.

Ultimately, I tend to agree with the authors that the communication clarity of the built-in Da Vinci speakers is subpar. Somehow I do not envision me wearing a wireless headset either . . . too likely to be thrown across the room "Steve Spurrier-style" and beset by its own peculiarities and limitations (as outlined in the manuscript). But we applaud the authors for recognizing that we are perhaps becoming less engaged with our OR staff, that we are all increasingly guilty of distraction and poor communication, and that we need to take our heads out of the console from time to time and turn down the Lil' Wayne.

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AUTHOR REPLY



The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

–George Bernard Shaw

The 27,000 pounds of thrust sucked the blood from my brain causing my peripheral vision to fade. The F-16 banked in a 6 G turn as we came back around to the target for the fifth and final run. As an Air Force surgeon being rewarded for service well

done, I had listened carefully to the communication during the premission briefing, . . . or at least I THOUGHT I had. I vividly remembered the pilot telling me, "If we have a bird strike or I pass out, just eject." We had been dropping ordinance during a training mission. On the final pass, the plane suddenly pitched violently toward the earth. A loud alarm announced our descent below the safe ceiling and suddenly a horrible sound came from behind my seat suggesting that the plane was breaking apart. In that fraction of a second, I considered ejecting to safety before we hit the ground. Fortunately, the pilot quickly pulled back on the stick and nosed us skyward. As I watched the target and ground disappeared behind us, I became acutely aware of how important communication really was. In my excitement to fly in a F-16, I had not appreciated that the final run was a low-level strafing using the 20-mm Gatling gun. As the sweat dried on my forehead, I understood that in war, the training for war, or in surgery . . . how NOT getting the complete communication could have potential dire consequences.

In the Air Force we called it "situational awareness". Our training officer said, "If you don't have it you get dead." At the time, it sounded melodramatic to a young physician, but the concept is important. Robotic surgery has made amazing advances, but these advances have come at the price of situational awareness. The surgeon can no longer use his ears, smell, and sense of feel to optimize patient outcomes. The scrub nurse cannot respond to the furrowed brow of the surgeon, anticipating his every wish. The remote location of the surgeon from the patient increases the importance of accurate communication, but also makes it more difficult to achieve.

We wholeheartedly agree that it is important to "pull our heads out" of the console every so often. We also agree that at times it might not hurt to turn down the music, although we might prefer vintage Eagles over Lil' Wayne. Also if the urge to enact a Steve Spurrier-style moment arises, one can always keep a backup headset handy. Madonna, Lady Gaga, the secret service, NFL coaches, Seal Team 6, airline pilots, and all sorts of important and successful people have experienced the benefits of enhanced communication between team members using wireless headsets. Why should not we, as surgeons, also have the best possible communication to enhance the outcomes for our patients.

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