



Letters to the Editor

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY AMONG SURGEONS

Sir,

I echo the call for more evaluation of performance anxiety (PA) and how it plays a part in how surgeons deliver care, highlighted by the paper of Hotton *et al* in the January 2019 *Bulletin*.

Well studied in fields of music and sport, PA is neglected in the delivery of high-performance surgery. In my own study of under-performance under pressure, consultant surgeons were compared with international standard competitive athletes in different disciplines (Mery Zanutto MSc Dissertation, Staffordshire University, 2018). Interestingly, surgeons use the same psychological techniques of internal and external focus as the professional athletes (external focus pictures the end result of the actions such as completing a shot or surgery, while internal focus concentrates on the fine movement required to deliver that action). Unlike the competitive athletes, surgeons exhibited an ability to operate at multiple levels, underlying the complexity of running a theatre team and a surgical procedure.

All surgeons admitted that pressure played a significant part in the quality of their performance, and all used the 'stop and stand back' technique described by Hotton *et al* when recalling a challenging surgical episode.

The similarities shown when both surgeons and athletes deliver demanding performance means a great deal of existing knowledge related to the professional sporting world might be usefully employed in coaching, training and mentoring

surgeons to maximise and safely deliver their performance.

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OPERATION BREXIT

Sir,

I follow with interest the events surrounding Brexit, and as a consultant surgeon, I liken this to a surgeon that may have ill-advised a patient to undergo an operation without offering adequate and informed consent. In this case the government is akin to the consultant surgeon and the patient represents the general public. It is the basic duty of any surgeon or physician to act as the advocate of the patient at all times – to put the health of the patient above all other considerations.

In order for the patient to make a decision as to whether or not to proceed with any proposed operation, it is duty of the surgeon to inform the patient of all the possible complications or adverse events that may arise. Only then can they go ahead with the proposed procedure. Thus the patient is fully cognisant of not only why they should go ahead with the operation in question, but they are also fully aware of what may go wrong.

In the case of the above debate, I would have grave doubts about the extent to which the government informed the public about any possible adverse events that may arise if we were to choose to go ahead with the option of Brexit. As things have unfolded during the past few weeks, it has become clear that we would be granted only a small proportion

of our Brexit wish list. The implications of this impending unforeseen event will be sorely felt in virtually every aspect of our lives. As our Prime Minister is travelling boldly around the boardrooms of Europe, trying in vain to improve our deal, our faces simply grow longer and longer, as the effects of this likely complication set in, deeper and deeper.

In this case, the operation in question has not yet commenced, 'knife to skin' has not yet occurred and we can still choose to draw a halt to the proceedings, although not without some significant damages on both sides. A referendum that offers the people the choice also assumes that the people are capable of making an informed and educated decision. In this case, the 'operation of Brexit' is not only a highly complex procedure, but also with many possible adverse events, and a full explanation of these matters was not given to the public at the time of the vote.

In spite of the long waiting lists that we and our patients endure, a consultant will not hesitate to cancel, even at the eleventh hour, the proposed operation, especially if his/her patient does not fully understand both the benefits of the procedure and the possible risks and complications. Being the advocate of the British public at all times, the government should be sufficiently bold and incisive to cancel the Brexit decision. The Prime Minister could do well to follow in true surgical spirit and step up to the table, withdraw from the deal, and put the health of our nation above all other considerations.

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