INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION (IJRSI)
ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue VII July 2026

Optimizing the Preoperative Holding Area Efficiency at Base Hospital Muthur

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1307000383

Received: 06 August 2026; Accepted: 12 August 2026; Published: 20 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Background: Prolonged pre-operative waiting times within holding areas exacerbate patient anxiety and threaten perioperative workflow efficiency. Minimizing these delays is crucial for patient-centered care and optimal resource utilization.

Objectives: This clinical audit aimed to evaluate patient transit delays between ward transfer and Operating Theater (OT) admission, introduce an enhanced synchronization protocol, and statistically evaluate the subsequent impact on waiting times.

Methods: A two-phase observational audit was performed. Phase 1 (Pre-Audit Baseline, n = 28) tracked delays using traditional schedule-based workflows. Following the introduction of a communication-driven 'Just-in-Time' transfer policy, Phase 2 (Post-Audit Re-evaluation, n = 44) was conducted. Data were analyzed using a Welch's independent t-test and 95% confidence intervals (CI).

Results: The baseline pre-audit revealed severe delays with a mean waiting time of 186.3 minutes (median = 140.0 min, max = 445.0 min). Post-intervention data demonstrated a highly significant shift, reducing the mean waiting time to 72.4 minutes (median = 30.0 min).

Conclusion: Active cross-departmental coordination significantly mitigates pre-operative stalls, successfully shifting the median patient wait time to align directly with international best-practice standards (≤ 30 minutes).

Keywords: Clinical audit, Preoperative waiting time, Holding area efficiency, Operating theatre workflow, Quality improvement, Just-in-Time patient transfer, Perioperative care, Operating room efficiency, Patient flow.

INTRODUCTION

The pre-operating waiting room serves as an essential staging area for final anesthesia evaluations, surgical site verification, and safety checklists. However, keeping patients stalled in this high-anxiety environment for longer than necessary undermines care quality and disrupts operating room throughput. International perioperative guidelines recommend that routine pre-operative waiting times should ideally be limited to 30–60 minutes.

The concept of the pre-operating waiting room plays a crucial role in the broader management of operating room (OR) efficiency, patient flow, and safety. Insights from recent studies illuminate how preoperative waiting times and environments impact patient experience and the overall surgical process.

Background and Context

Pre-Operative Waiting Times and Their Causes

Preoperative waiting times represent a critical phase in the surgical care continuum, encompassing the interval from initial referral or decision to operate until the actual surgery occurs. Understanding the causes of these delays is essential to optimize patient outcomes, resource use, and overall healthcare efficiency. Insights from multiple studies provide a detailed perspective on waiting times and their multifactorial origins.

A high-resolution analysis of wait times for urological surgeries found that the average time from decision to operate to the surgical date was approximately 76 days, accounting for over half of the total waiting period, while the pre-decision referral wait constituted the remainder (47%) (Cole et al., 2013). This highlights that waiting is not confined to the immediate preoperative period but spans earlier phases in the care pathway.

In bariatric surgery, median wait times ranged dramatically—shortest quartile patients waited under 67 days, while longest quartile patients waited over 204 days—with an overall trend towards increasing delays over a decade (Alvarez et al., 2019). This variability underscores how patient, insurance, and systemic factors interplay in elongating wait times.

Operating room inefficiencies emerge as significant contributors to waiting periods. A study monitoring operating room processes identified several primary causes of preoperative waiting related to intraoperative factors:

- Delay in completing previous surgeries (contributing to 33.8% of waiting times)
- Preparation of surgical teams (23.8%)
- Preparation of tables and equipment (16.1%)
- Personnel-related reasons (13%)
- Cleaning of the operating rooms (9.2%) (Mutlu & Aslan, 2026)

These operational delays manifest as prolonged waiting in specific hospital areas before surgery and contribute directly to postponed surgery start times. The largest waiting times were recorded in areas impacted by delayed preceding surgeries and setup inefficiencies.

Additionally, hospital scheduling limitations exacerbate patient wait times. Conventional static scheduling methods fail to adapt well to real-time changes, leading to prolonged waits. Innovative dynamic scheduling systems incorporating explainable AI and fuzzy logic frameworks have demonstrated the potential to reduce average waiting times substantially, improving schedule responsiveness and operating room utilization (El-Balka et al., 2025).

Uncertainty in surgical durations and the coordination of multiple sequential stages (pre-surgery, surgery, and post-surgery recovery) also complicate scheduling. Algorithms aimed at robust scheduling under these uncertainties seek to minimize total process time (makespan) and reduce intraoperative delays, which indirectly affect patient wait times (Lin & Chong, 2025; Lin & Yen, 2023).

Patient-specific factors also influence wait times. Predictors of shorter waits include cancer diagnosis, younger age, higher urgency scores, repeat patients, and female gender, while factors such as insurance status (e.g., Medicaid for bariatric surgery patients), sleep apnea, psychological disorders, hyperlipidemia, and smoking history are associated with longer delays (Alvarez et al., 2019; Cole et al., 2013).

Delays in starting scheduled surgeries and waiting times between procedures have been associated with worse patient outcomes, including increased adverse events postoperatively. For instance, starting an elective surgery more than an hour late correlates with a significant rise in major adverse events within 30 days post-surgery, emphasizing the patient safety implications of preoperative delays (Pasquer et al., 2024).

System-wide approaches to reduce backlogs and wait times have demonstrated considerable success. Centralized management of waiting lists using electronic patient record integration has been shown to halve surgical backlogs and reduce mean waiting times by over five months, besides improving theatre utilization. These results highlight the benefit of coordinated, data-driven wait time management strategies (Daoud et al., 2026).

In early-phase cancer clinical trials, automated patient check-in systems and real-time wait time tracking led to significant decreases in mean wait times, demonstrating that operational modifications and real-time visibility can improve patient flow and resource use (Mengistu et al., 2016).

Design and Patient Experience in Waiting Rooms

Research on outpatient surgery waiting areas underscores that the design of the waiting environment influences the comfort and satisfaction of patients' care partners, who often spend extended periods there. Factors such as seat location, privacy, comfort, and visibility to key areas like registration affect how individuals choose seating and perceive quality of care. Importantly, preferences are task-dependent: proximity to patients is most valued during check-in, while seat location and comfort take precedence in other phases (Jafarifiroozabadi et al., 2020). This highlights the necessity of designing pre-operative waiting rooms with flexible seating arrangements and consideration of privacy and accessibility to optimize user experience.

Lean Management and Process Optimization in Pre-Op Settings

Lean thinking seeks to identify and eliminate non-value-added activities ("waste") in healthcare workflows to increase efficiency and patient-centered care. By mapping processes, collecting data, and employing iterative improvement cycles, Lean enhances flow and reduces delays. A preeminent example is the use of process value flow mapping for surgical pathways that visually represent patient journeys, information flow, and material logistics to identify bottlenecks and improvement opportunities (Sales-Coll et al., 2021).

In trauma surgery care, managing the urgent surgical process via Lean techniques reduced waiting times by 20.5%, decreased nonoperative operating room times by 23.1%, and increased efficiency by nearly 10%, all without additional personnel resources. Reorganizing patient flow and shifting anesthesia induction outside the OR contributed substantially to these gains (Torkki et al., 2006).

Similarly, in neurosurgical procedures like lumbar spinal fusion, Lean principles combined with PDSA cycles helped create standardized workflows that modularize surgery into discrete components. This facilitated identifying and removing sources of waste, such as wait times and equipment defects, which represented 15% and 66% of waste, respectively. Process maps and spaghetti diagrams were instrumental in revealing steps with high variability and inefficiency (Liu et al., 2018; Raskin et al., 2015).

By applying Lean management, operating room efficiency improved measurably in several domains:

- **Waiting Time Reduction:** Streamlined pre-op and OR workflows reduce patient waiting times. One-stop clinics that combined surgical consultation and preoperative assessment in a single visit significantly reduced hospital visits and surgical wait times (Siddique et al., 2012).
- **Scheduling and Resource Utilization:** Lean-driven improvements in scheduling processes and sharing of surgical resources enhanced OR utilization and minimized idle times. Cultural changes in managing surgical resources and activity planning underpinned these efficiencies (Sales-Coll et al., 2021).
- **Cycle Time and Throughput:** In endoscopy and labor/delivery OR settings, targeting defined bottlenecks such as front desk delays, recovery room turnover, and personnel availability, Lean methodologies using PDSA cycles substantially reduced procedure cycle times and increased patient satisfaction (Youssef et al., 2013; Zaid et al., 2015).

- **Perioperative Workflow Standardization:** Employing Lean Six Sigma (LSS) quality improvement models, complex plastic surgical procedures achieved markedly decreased total operative and incision-to-closure times. Workflow improvements included optimized spatial positioning of surgeons, surgeon-specific surgical trays, and clear role delineation, which jointly improved intraoperative efficiency (Claire Suydam et al., 2022; Tanna et al., 2023).

Successful Lean transformation depends heavily on committed leadership and a supportive culture. Studies indicate that leadership engagement, specialized training, and involving frontline providers are critical in sustaining Lean initiatives. Leadership drives the embedding of continuous improvement mindsets and waste reduction awareness, fostering operational excellence across diverse healthcare settings (Veres et al., 2025).

By eliminating waste, standardizing steps, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement led by committed leadership, healthcare organizations can significantly boost the efficiency and quality of surgical care pathways. Real-world applications from trauma centers, neurosurgery, endoscopy units, and complex plastic surgery demonstrate the broad applicability and value of Lean techniques in optimizing preoperative and perioperative environments (Claire Suydam et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2018; Sales-Coll et al., 2021; Torkki et al., 2006; Veres et al., 2025; Youssef et al., 2013).

Implications for Patient Safety and Satisfaction

Pre-operative waiting rooms are integral to patient safety and the surgical team's preparedness. Studies of operating room nurses' experiences stress the importance of teamwork, communication, and adherence to safety protocols in all perioperative phases, including pre-op waiting. Nurses often mitigate risks by adjusting workflows dynamically within the constraints of organizational conditions, which may sometimes rely on individual initiative in the waiting and preparation phases (Nyberg et al., 2021; Park et al., 2015). Effective management of the pre-op waiting area, therefore, is essential not only for efficiency but also for upholding patient safety standards.

The pre-operative waiting room is a critical node in the surgical care pathway that significantly affects patient flow, waiting times, experience, and safety. Challenges leading to delays include surgical schedule overruns and preparatory tasks, which can be addressed through Lean management, improved communication, and innovative processes such as parallel patient preparation. User-centered design focusing on seating comfort and accessibility further enhances satisfaction for patients and their care partners. Finally, continuous attention to teamwork and safety protocols during this phase supports optimal surgical outcomes (Mutlu and Aslan, 2026; Jafarifiroozabadi et al., 2020; Sales-Coll et al., 2021; Friedman et al., 2006; Nyberg et al., 2021; Park et al., 2015; Mazur et al., 2016).

Prior to this audit, our institution noted variable and extended patient wait times outside the theater suite. This project was initiated to quantify baseline delays, implement targeted administrative interventions, and rigorously analyze the resultant operational changes.

Justification

The justification for improving operating room (OR) efficiency and reducing patient waiting times is grounded in substantial evidence demonstrating its impact on healthcare quality, resource utilization, and patient and staff satisfaction. Lean management (LM) tools, as shown in a comprehensive real-world study, have resulted in remarkable enhancements in surgical efficiency by streamlining the entire patient care pathway, improving scheduling, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. These interventions led directly to reductions in waiting times and increased operating room throughput, which are essential for optimizing hospital resource use and patient flow (Sales-Coll et al., 2021).

Similarly, methods based on Six Sigma quality management have proven effective in standardizing surgical processes and reducing variability, directly diminishing total waiting times in surgical rooms. By systematically analysing and refining each segment of the surgical timeline, hospitals can achieve more predictable operations,

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue VII July 2026

which not only improve patient satisfaction but also promote higher medical quality in surgical care (Chang et al., 2018).

The physical and organizational environment also plays a critical role. Patient-centred clinic and facility design, including the layout of waiting areas and operating suites, has been linked to enhanced operational efficiency and improved patient experiences. For example, studies highlight how improved navigability, privacy, and comfort in waiting spaces reduce anxiety and streamline patient movement, which supports smoother perioperative workflows (Zamani et al., 2025). Furthermore, attention to the ergonomic needs and well-being of surgical teams through operating room design reduces stress and may contribute to efficiency and safety improvements (Oh et al., 2024).

Innovative scheduling protocols like the Golden Patient Pathway exemplify how targeting early surgical cases with precise timelines can significantly enhance first-hour operating theater utilization, decrease waiting times, and improve bed management — crucial factors in high-demand emergency surgical services (Rizkallah and Smith, 2022).

Moreover, leveraging data-driven technologies such as artificial intelligence to predict remaining intra-surgical time facilitates dynamic OR scheduling and reduces idle time and patient waiting durations substantially. This forward-looking approach ensures readiness of surgical teams and the next patient, maximizing room utilization and satisfaction levels (Ramadan et al., 2025).

Collectively, the justification for pursuing efficiency improvements in operating rooms and minimizing waiting times rests on the balance of improving quality of care, patient safety, team performance, and hospital operational capacity. These gains ultimately translate into better patient outcomes, reduced anxiety, heightened satisfaction, and optimal use of limited healthcare resources, validating rigorous implementation of management tools, design strategies, and innovative scheduling methods (Sales-Coll et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2018; Zamani et al., 2025; Rizkallah and Smith, 2022; Oh et al., 2024; Ramadan et al., 2025).

Objectives

General Objectives

To optimize the efficiency of the preoperative holding area through the implementation and evaluation of a quality improvement intervention at Base Hospital Muthur.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the baseline preoperative waiting time of patients from ward transfer to the operating theatre during the pre-audit phase.
2. To identify factors contributing to prolonged waiting times in the preoperative holding area.
3. To implement a standardized communication-based "Just-in-Time" patient transfer protocol to improve coordination between wards and the operating theatre.
4. To compare preoperative waiting times before and after implementation of the intervention using appropriate statistical methods.
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in improving compliance with established preoperative waiting time standards.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Optimizing the efficiency of Pre-Operating Holding Areas (pre-op units) is a critical component of enhancing the overall surgical care pathway. Pre-op areas serve as transitional spaces where patients are prepared for surgery, and inefficiencies here can lead to cascading delays, increased patient anxiety, and suboptimal utilization of operating rooms (ORs). The existing literature, largely centered on quality improvement (QI) methodologies and healthcare process optimization, provides valuable insights into strategies and interventions relevant to pre-op efficiency.

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Across surgical disciplines, quality improvement initiatives have been widely leveraged to address inefficiencies at multiple points in surgical care, including preoperative phases. Systematic reviews indicate that QI approaches adapted from manufacturing, such as Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, Lean, Six Sigma, and Total Quality Management, yield measurable improvements in reducing delays, improving patient outcomes, and enhancing safety (Irwin et al., 2015; Nicolay et al., 2012).

These methods emphasize process mapping, waste identification, iterative testing of changes, and staff engagement, all of which are applicable to pre-op area optimization. For example, Lean management principles focus on eliminating non-value-added steps, streamlining patient flow, and reducing waiting times to enhance throughput and patient satisfaction. The continuous quality improvement (CQI) approach applies data-driven cycles to refine workflows, while Six Sigma projects target variation reduction and defect prevention in surgical processes, including patient preparation (Nicolay et al., 2012).

The efficiency of pre-op units is influenced by both organizational and clinical factors. Systematic reviews emphasize the significance of contextual elements such as the composition and capability of QI teams, organizational culture, leadership engagement, and resource availability in determining the success of QI interventions (Kringos et al., 2015; Veres et al., 2025).

Operationally, pre-op delays can result from inadequate staffing, poor communication pathways, uncoordinated scheduling, incomplete preoperative assessments, and logistical bottlenecks in patient transport and room turnover (Rashid et al., 2026). Furthermore, disparities in resource allocation and systemic constraints in low-resource settings exacerbate delays, underscoring the necessity of tailored QI strategies attentive to the local context (Eco et al., 2025).

Several targeted interventions have shown efficacy in optimizing pre-op processes:

- **Process Standardization and Pathway Management:** Standardizing preoperative protocols and care pathways reduces variability and improves predictability in patient flow, ultimately decreasing waiting times and operational inefficiencies (He et al., 2025; Rashid et al., 2026).

- **Multidisciplinary Team Engagement and Leadership:** Leadership-driven initiatives that engage multidisciplinary teams support sustained improvements by aligning clinical activities with operational goals, enhancing communication, and fostering a culture of safety and continuous improvement (Gerrein et al., 2013; Veres et al., 2025).

- **Data-Driven Feedback and Audit:** Regular auditing of processes and performance feedback to frontline staff augment awareness of inefficiencies and catalyze responsive changes, helping to sustain improvements in pre-op operations (Rashid et al., 2026).

- **Use of Checklists and Care Bundles:** Implementing surgical safety checklists and perioperative care bundles has been correlated with reductions in complications and delays, indirectly contributing to more effective pre-op workflows and patient preparation (Rashid et al., 2026).

- **Tailored Training in QI Methodologies:** Equipping staff with skills in Lean, Six Sigma, and PDSA practices enables frontline providers to identify waste and test process improvements directly within pre-op units (Gerrein et al., 2013; Ludwig et al., 2025).

While many QI studies report improvements in timeliness, efficiency, and patient safety outcomes, the literature also highlights the predominance of uncontrolled before-after designs and a general paucity of high-quality randomized controlled trials (Nicolay et al., 2012; Rashid et al., 2026). This limits the certainty with which causality can be inferred from reported gains. Nevertheless, meta-analyses in related high-acuity settings such as pediatric emergency departments demonstrate meaningful decreases in length of stay and improved patient flow when QI and safety culture interventions are employed, underscoring the transferability of these methods to pre-op settings (Onyejesi et al., 2025).

Quality improvement initiatives in low-resource and rural hospital settings face unique barriers including limited funding, insufficient trained personnel, and challenges in data collection consistency (Eco et al., 2025). Innovations such as virtual monitoring, telemedicine support, and simplified checklist packages have augmented QI success in pre-op and surgical domains within these environments, highlighting the importance of adaptability to contextual realities.

Optimizing preoperative holding area efficiency is an attainable goal supported by a growing body of quality improvement literature. Employing standardized care pathways, multidisciplinary engagement, data-driven feedback, and tailored QI methodologies—while attentively managing contextual factors—forms the cornerstone of successful interventions. However, further robust, high-quality studies are warranted to establish best practice models and generalizable frameworks specifically tailored to pre-op efficiency enhancement.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design:

A cross sectional pre and post intervention study was conducted among the surgical wards maternity wards, Gynaecological ward and the operation theatre.

Study Setting:

Base Hospital Mutur, Trincomalee District, Eastern province, Sri Lanka.

Study period:

Pre intervention phase from 1st June 2026 to 14th June 2026. Implementation phase from 15th June 2026 to 30th June 2026 and post intervention phase from 1st July 2026 to 14th July 2026.

Study Population:

All the patients undergoing elective surgery during the stipulated study period was taken.

Exclusion Criteria:

Emergency surgical cases were excluded from the study.

Study Instruments:

Qualitative Instruments:

Structured data collection forms

Operation Theatre register.

Ward transfer register/ Patient Bed Head Ticket

Qualitative instruments:

Focus Group discussions with Medical Superintendent, Consultant Surgeon, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Consultant Anaesthetist, Medical officers in the relevant wards/ICU/Theatre, Sister In charge of the relevant wards and Operation Theatre.

Methods and Intervention

This study utilized a sequential quality improvement framework across two distinct operational periods:

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue VII July 2026

- **Phase 1 (Pre-Audit Baseline):** Data from 1st June 2026 to 14th June 2026, consecutive surgical cases were tracked from the time the patient departed from the ward ('Sending Time') to when they were officially accepted inside the operation theater. ('Receiving Time').
- **The Operational Intervention:** Analysis of baseline bottlenecks revealed that wards frequently 'pushed' patients forward prematurely based on fixed, estimated daily list times. A 'Just-in-Time' pull communication policy was introduced. Wards were explicitly barred from transporting patients until receiving an immediate verbal or electronic directive from the OT floor coordinator, verifying that the previous case had entered the closing phase.
- **Phase 2 (Post-Audit Re-evaluation):** Following protocol implementation, a larger cohort of surgical cases from 1st July 2026 to 14th July 2026 was tracked using identical temporal parameters to measure systemic compliance and impact.

Statistical Analysis

Because observational quality improvement workflows inherently involve variable weekly surgical volumes and changing group variances, data were analyzed using Welch's independent t-test (which does not assume equal sample sizes or equal variances). Two-sided 95% confidence intervals were calculated for individual group means and the absolute difference between means, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results and Comparative Analysis

An analysis of the 72 cumulative surgical tracking records demonstrated a drastic downward shift in overall delays.

Table 1: Clinical Quality Benchmarking & Compliance Standards

Target Performance Threshold	Pre-Audit Baseline Compliance (n=28)	Post-Audit Protocol Compliance (n=44)	Statistical Risk / Progress Shift
Optimal Target (≤ 30 mins)	2.9%	56.5%	+53.6% improvement in instant processing
Acceptable Target (≤ 60 mins)	11.8%	69.6%	+57.8% shift away from critical delay
Critical Delay Zone (> 120 mins)	53.6%	13.6%	-40.0% reduction in severe patient stagnation

Table 2: Specific Efficiency Matrix (Post-Audit Profile)

Surgical Sub-Specialty Category	Monitored Cases (n)	Mean Wait Time (Mins)	Median Wait Time (Mins)	Clinical Status vs. Standard
Obstetrics (Elective LSCS)	10	27.4	10.0	Fully Optimized (≤ 30 mins target met)
Gynecology (D&C)	2	22.5	22.5	Fully Optimized (≤ 30 mins target met)
Minor / Trauma Suturing Operations	7	62.9	45.0	Acceptable Performance Window
General & Other Specialty Surgery	25	78.0	30.0	Highly Variable (Incipient improvements)
Endoscopy / Colonoscopy Procedures	2	237.5	237.5	Operational Bottleneck (Outlier Sub-group)

Table 3: Inferential Difference Testing (Welch's Two-Sample t-test)

Analytical Metric	Value	Statistical Significance Interpellation
Absolute Mean Reduction	113.9 minutes	Average delay cut by nearly 2 full hours per patient
Absolute Median Reduction	110.0 minutes	Structural processing speeds up across the middle 50%
95% Confidence Interval (CI) of Diff	[61.2, 166.5] mins	Highly stable interval; zero overlaps with null hypothesis
Computed t-statistic	$t = 4.33$	Demonstrates powerful variance-adjusted distance between means
Calculated Probabilistic p-value	$p = 0.00008$	Highly significant ($p < 0.001$); change is non-random

The stratifications presented in Tables 1 and 2 reveal that the clinical improvement was both statistically structural and procedurally sweeping. Notably, the critical delay zone, where patients languished over 2 hours in a state of high anxiety, shrank from a majority of 53.6% down to a minimal 13.6%.

When isolated by surgical category (Table 2), the 'Just-in-Time' pull protocol achieved its highest marks in the Obstetrics and Gynecology departments, bringing median processing delays down to a highly responsive 10.0 and 22.5 minutes respectively. Conversely, Endoscopy procedures remained an outlier bottleneck (Mean = 237.5 minutes), identifying a specific workflow stream that requires isolated corrective administrative action in the next audit cycle.

DISCUSSION

The results of this audit validate the power of replacing passive schedule-based logistics with a dynamic 'pull' communication strategy. Cutting nearly two hours of absolute waiting time per patient mitigates the physiological challenges associated with extended fasting and significantly limits pre-operative psychological distress.

Furthermore, reducing standard deviations from 121.9 to 81.2 minutes shows that the entire perioperative stream gained predictability. While extreme outliers still occurred in Phase 2 (with a maximum delay of 290 minutes), these were strictly tied to acute emergency interventions, such as Emergency LSCS cases, which inherently disrupt elective scheduling and necessitate holding downstream patients until stabilization occurs.

Study Limitations

A noted limitation in this audit process was the incomplete documentation of patient fasting times within the Phase 2 dataset. This was largely driven by the high prevalence of urgent emergency cases captured during the re-evaluation cycle, where life-saving interventions take precedence over non-critical administrative tracking. Future audit iterations will seek to integrate mandatory fasting logs into an electronic health record system to explore the relationship between objective waiting intervals and patient metabolic profiles.

Recommendations for Sustained Quality

1. **Formalize the Intercom 'Pull' Mandate:** Ensure that the verbal clearance protocol between the OT floor coordinator and individual surgical wards is hardcoded into the hospital's standard operating procedures (SOPs).
2. **Implement Real-Time Tracking Displays:** Introduce a synchronized digital dashboard accessible by both ward and theater staff to provide visual cues regarding active theater turnarounds.

3. **Targeted Outlier Reviews:** Conduct rapid-cycle micro-audits specifically targeting any case that exceeds a 60-minute pre-operative wait time to continuously identify and troubleshoot emerging institutional bottlenecks.

CONCLUSION:

The provided summary accurately reflects the key findings and implications of the clinical audit detailed in the selected text. It clearly presents the significant reduction in preoperative waiting times following the implementation of the "Just-in-Time" communication protocol, supported by robust statistical evidence from the audit.

Key points from the selected text that align with the summary include:

- Significant decrease in mean waiting time from 186.3 to 72.4 minutes, with median times aligning to international standards (≤ 30 minutes).
- Improved compliance with target waiting times, with a notable reduction in critical delays (>120 minutes) from 53.6% to 13.6%.
- The intervention’s success in most surgical specialties, especially Obstetrics and Gynecology, while identifying persistent bottlenecks in Endoscopy procedures requiring further attention.
- Emphasis on enhanced communication and synchronization between wards and the operating theatre as a resource-neutral, organizational improvement.
- Recommendations for sustaining improvements through formalizing protocols, real-time tracking, and targeted outlier reviews.

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