

Evidence Base: Situation Monitoring

Situation monitoring is the process of actively scanning and assessing elements of the “situation” to gain or maintain an accurate awareness or understanding of the situation in which the team is functioning.

One aspect of situation monitoring is systems monitoring. Systems monitoring includes tracking both internal systems components (e.g., human resources and equipment) and environmental conditions (e.g., number of OR rooms available, or status of other patients on the unit). These monitoring activities contribute to team cognition, which includes the concepts of shared mental models¹ and shared situation awareness.²

SMMs and situation awareness have been empirically linked to improved communication,³⁻⁵ team coordination,⁶⁻⁷ and awareness of teams’ surroundings for effective problem solving.⁸ Similarly, situation awareness is the aspect of individual and team cognitive states when an individual or team is aware of what is going on around them regarding the environment and patient state, and how those conditions affect the team’s work.² Knowing the degree to which a team is “on the same page” can aid in determining how well the team will perform.¹

Teams working in dynamic environments, such as health care, need to monitor and assess internal and external systems, allowing for identification of changes that can affect tasks or the final goal. Engaging in effective situation monitoring allows team members to have a better grasp of the state of the patient and situation, thereby contributing to situation awareness. In fact, poor situation monitoring has been considered a contributor to clinical errors,⁹ whereas high situation awareness has been linked to increased team performance needed for patient care.¹⁰ Fortunately, situation awareness is a learnable skill, and health care providers can increase their understanding and perceived usefulness of situation awareness through training programs.¹¹

TeamSTEPPS® trains health care providers on situation monitoring. In fact, some consider situation monitoring to be the TeamSTEPPS component most likely to prevent a patient safety event.¹² Sawyer, et al.,¹³ found that health care providers gained significant improvements in situation monitoring on a simulated neonatal resuscitation after being trained with TeamSTEPPS tools. Similarly, Capella, et al.,¹⁴ found significant pre- and post-training change in situation monitoring within a trauma team after being trained with TeamSTEPPS.

Situation monitoring is an important aspect of TeamSTEPPS. It allows health care providers to increase awareness of the patient condition, the environmental state, and their fellow team members. This can serve to reduce errors and thus enhance patient safety. In summary, situation monitoring embodies a set of behaviors taken by an individual to perform a variety of functions that help the team:

Actively scan critical elements of the surrounding environment or situation to assess these important elements¹⁵:

- Facilitate strategy implementation¹⁶;

- Engage in team learning and regulation¹⁷⁻¹⁸; and
- Correct problems before they occur.⁶

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Additional Resources

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