GIVING PATIENTS A VOICE: THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE POST-ANESTHESIA CARE UNIT (PACU) FOR PATIENTS WITH HEAD AND NECK CANCER

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Introduction: Head and neck surgery often leads to compromised communication. Nurses may be faced with difficult challenges in trying to assist these patients towards optimal recovery.

Identification of the problem: Patients who are scheduled for a tracheostomy or laryngectomy often have communication concerns. An iPad may be a tool to bridge communication between patients and staff in the immediate post-operative period.

Purpose of the Study: The objectives of this IRB approved study were to test the feasibility, patient satisfaction and usefulness of an iPad as a communication tool.

Methodology: A convenience sample of patients with head and neck cancer, scheduled for a procedure that results in altered communication, were eligible to participate.
Proloquo2Go™, an application for computers and mobile devices that provides a "voice" for people who have difficulty speaking, was utilized. The program was customized by the investigators to the needs of the patients in the PACU. Staff received training on the iPad and software. Patients completed brief surveys (pre-surgery, at PACU discharge and 1-4 days post surgery) to obtain information regarding their communication in the PACU and to understand what they liked about the iPad/ Proloquo2Go™ and where improvements can be made.

Results: We consented 38 patients; 25 used the iPad and completed the questionnaires and 13 were not evaluable due to medical reasons (i.e. sedation) and/or they did not complete the questionnaires. If 50% of patients were able to use the iPad and/or 50% were satisfied, it was considered a successful study. Patients who stated they were very concerned about communicating postoperatively (61%) rated that the iPad was "very helpful" for communicating and that they were "satisfied" with using it.

Discussion: This pilot study demonstrated that providing an iPad as an alternative means of communication was beneficial for some patients but not for all.

Conclusion: The iPad and application gives the nurse an alternate tool to use when choosing the best method of communication for their patient.

Implications for perianesthesia nurses and future research: While the use of technology to communicate in the PACU is promising, further research is needed to identify different applications that can be utilized to improve communication.