

# Original Research Article

## The paucity of hand written surgical notes as compared to global standard: Our experience in Asian Subregional Hospital

### Abstract

**Background:** Accurate legible documentation of operation notes is core element of surgical practice in any Specialty .Complete comprehensive operation notes are also important for maintaining high standard of patient care and for defense in medico legal cases.

**Aims:** Objective of our study was to compare the quality of orthopedic trauma operation notes at our hospital with standard set by the Royal college of Surgeons , England (RCSE) 2008.

**Material and Methods:** Retrospective review of 300 Orthopedic trauma surgery notes was carried out for the period 01/1/2017 to 31/12/2017. Additional variables not included in RCSE 2008 guidelines were included in results. The complete data collected was analyzed using SPCC 20 version.

**Results:** The demographic details as well as date, time of surgery, name of surgeon, assistant surgeon, anesthetist, scrub nurse and signature were documented well in nearly all cases. Notes were written by the lead surgeon in 80.6 % the cases and 0.5% were consultant notes. Adequate document were; Implant usage in 62.5%, Postoperative instructions 96.6%, Intra operative complications ,blood loss, ICD -10 coding were poorly documented while Tourniquet time was not documented well.

**Conclusion:** Our study highlighted major deficiencies in some areas with good compliance in other areas. Therefore we suggest to use aide memoire and standard based Performa's which will improve quality of operation notes and better follow up patient care.

**Keywords:** medico legal cases, surgical notes, Orthopedic trauma surgery , blood loss

### Introduction

A high standard of medical record keeping is important for safe Safe care of patients. Comprehensive, \documentation of surgical operation notes is an essential part of any surgery as it contains details of all relevant operation findings, postoperative plans to facilitate post operative management of the patients . They are important for medical cost billing, quality assurance, education, research purposes and medico-legal issues. The importance of good note keeping is recognized by the General Medical Council ( GMC) which states that good note keeping is an essential part of good medical practice [1] .

The Royal college of surgeons of England (RCSE) in keeping with this published the booklet:

. "Good surgical Practice" which contains recommendation for documentation of complete operation notes [2]. The British orthopedic association (BOA ) also states that "good record keeping is as basic tools of clinical practice "[3]. There is no consensus among surgical disciplines on the required standard operative notes. The Royal royal college of surgeons of England (RCSE) published guidelines on the operative notes documentation are widely accepted in the United Kingdom and supported by the British Orthopaedic Association.

There has been increasing litigation rates in orthopedics being only second to obstetrics and Gynecology worldwide the same trend is emerging in this part of globe. This fact is also highlighted by the National Confidential Enquiry into Per operative deaths in U.K.[4] which labeled orthopedic operation notes as “untidy one liners” due to poor incomplete , inadequate operation documentation and inappropriate abbreviation use . As stated elsewhere the yearly increase in orthopedic litigation of 16% between 2010 - 2011 and 2011 -2012 compared to the 6% increase in the NHS is note worthy.

In our hospital computerized electronic surgical note keeping saved in the Hospital Information management system( HIMS) software is the practice as hand written notes were often found illegible, could be lost or misplaced over period of time .

The aim of this audit was to assess the completeness of our Orthopaedic surgery operative notes and:

- Evaluate its completeness with respect to the RCSE 2008 guidelines
- Highlight the essential information found lacking in the notes
- Develop an electronic operation note templates for common orthopedic procedures
- Link the ICD-10 diagnosis codes, co morbidities and operation codes thereby promoting integrated sustainable comprehensive electronic notes that are easily accessible for nurses, physiotherapy staff to achieve optimal postoperative rehabilitation of patient care and follow up in the outpatient clinic .

### ***Material and Methods :***

The study was conducted by retrospective review of 300 orthopedic trauma surgery operation notes with respect to RCSE 2008 guidelines over a period twelve months from 01/1/2017 to 31/12/2017 .Additional variables not included in RCSE guidelines 2008 were also analyzed in the results. The study sample included both adult and pediatric patients admitted in our hospital.The information about surgery notes was extracted from Hospital Information management system( HIMS) and recorded on prepared data performa sheet .Informed consent was not required in our study as it was retrospective review of already stored data in HIMS with no patient contact required. However patient confidentiality was reffered.

### **Inclusion Criteria :**

- All orthopedic trauma patients admitted in our hospital for who underwent major elective or emergency surgery.

#### Exclusion Criteria :

- Patients who underwent Intermediate or minor orthopedic surgery such as closed reductions under anaesthesia , Excision of ganglion , K - wire removal etc.
- Polytrauma patients with multiple injuries .
- Soft tissue surgery where no implant was used.
- Local intrarticular or intratendinous injections
- Revision orthopedic surgery cases
- Where operation notes data could not be retrieved or was incomplete

#### *Data Analysis :*

The data derived was compared to RCSE 2008 operation notes guidelines on data sheet in coding manner for each variable: Present, Absent and Not applicable (NA). The percentage of all variable codes with mean was calculated. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. The final outcome was assessed by recording the number of variables missing from RCSE 2008 set guidelines plus additional variables not included in RCSE 2008 guidelines.( Table 1-2 ) .

#### *Results:*

The study compared a total of three hundred 300 orthopedic trauma operation notes which comprised of 210 adult and 90 pediatric upper and lower limb surgery notes. All operation notes were legible as we used electronic system 3 for entering patient notes. Only 203 (67.7%) of all notes met all the set RCSE 2008 guidelines. The missing variables were 1-5, 6-12 and 13-18 in 15 (0.5%), 36 (12%), 46 (15.3%) patients respectively (Table 1).

The of operation notes written by Surgeon were 242(80.6%) while those of the Assistant Surgeon were 58(19.4%). Only 15 (0.5%) notes were written by the Consultants, (273 / 91%) by the specialist grade surgeons and 12(0.4%) by the medical officers. The signatures were present in all notes, as by default the surgeon entering the notes on logging in the HIMS is automatically saved by computer. Additional 19-23 variables found to be missing in 14(4.7%) patients and in 286(95.3%) variable2 4-27 were missing (Table 2) .

Majority of patients were adult males 186 (62%), females 58 (19.4%) and children 56 (18.6%).

**Pre operative Details:** Final diagnosis was not revised based on intra operative findings in 217 (72.4%) cases. There was inadequate ICD-10 coding in 98.2% of operation case notes reviewed. Consent forms were completed in all cases however 241(80.4 %) cases were obtained by non operating surgeons while 59 (19.6% cases were by the operating surgeon.

There was no documentation in In 97 (32.3 %) of the elective or emergency operations cases. Tourniquet was used in 92 (30.6%) cases but poor poor documentation of pressure , start end time of tourniquet in all cases were noted.

The implants used were inadequately documented in 188(62.6%) cases.

Blood loss estimates were missing in all operation notes.

Intraoperative complication rate was documented adequately in 290 (96.6%) cases.

### ***Discussion :***

This is a novel subregional audit study carried out at the Nizwa Hospital Regional referral trauma centre, Oman as a medical outlet for a large population. The availability of a legible and accurately documented operation notes is essential for rendition of medicare and basis for auditing in a resource challenge environment, Secondly it provides reliable easily accessible communication platform for healthcare professionals and medico legal concerns. There is no perfect operation notes model which vacuum the . RCSE guidelines [2] readily fits in, has been widely accepted as ideal reference guideline for operation notes documentation. Our study and findings provide us with good insight of orthopedic trauma operations and Surgeons documentation of operation notes.

Most of the Surgeons notes documented well the technical aspects but lacked documentation of secondary details where ( only 67.7% notes were completed as per RCSE guidelines while 98% of the notes of the additional variables were found missing).

This study highlighted important missing points in our practice as compared to other studies also [3,5-9]. Various reasons advanced included poor compliance with guidelines as a result of absent formal training in documentation of operation notes. Secondly, time constraint in operation theatre forcing suboptimal notes documentation

*Acquisition of patients biodata in form of Patients' name, age, gender and hospital registration number* were documented electronically in all cases and stored routinely in HIMS at variance to other studies [6,9,14,15] in which cases the variables were lacking in 32-54% cases.

There are good chances of misplacement or loss of hand written operation notes documentation as a result of non diligent patients documentation. In this study, the good documentation of 95% and 5% compliance of date and timing of surgery and start and end time of surgery of surgery respectively correlates well with other studies [3,6,9,14].

The 80.6% (n =242) cases of the operation notes written by operating surgeon and in 19.4% (n=58) by assistant in our study, is lower than the 90-100% operating surgeons written operation notes Only 15(0.5%) notes were written by Consultant. Operation notes written by senior surgeons were found to be more elaborate and detailed compared to those written by Junior surgeons(3,17).

This study recording of the Anesthetist and scrub nurse names in all our cases correlates well with other studies (14, 18) but at variance with . Hamza et al [9] 13.9% and scrub nurse in 0.9% cases only.

The provisional diagnosis recorded in our cases and intra operative finding based diagnosis of 72.4% cases is similar to other studies [9,18]. where it was missing to the tune of 77% to 100% respectively .Other studies [6,15] only in 10-15 percentage of cases it was missing.

Correct ICD-10 coding is of medicolegal import in negligence law suit and claim payment delay [2,19].In our study ICD-10 coding was seen in 98.2% of operation case notes reviewed. There is no clear documentation of type of surgical procedure elective or emergency in 32.6% (98) cases. which is reflected in other studies also where it varies from 1 to 97% [3,9,14,15,18]. Although the type of surgery can be checked from theatre registry and documentation of type of surgery can be improved by introduction of Aide Memoire and surgeon education[8,20].

The type of anesthesia, drugs used and any adverse events during and complications as recorded in this study as documented in 92% cases is at variance to other studies 68% [11], 80.6% [14] but correlates well with the 94% in [9] cases respectively .

Consent forms were completed in all cases, 80.4% obtained by non operating doctor in consonance but higher than 53% obtained in other studies [21] w. Insufficiently filled consent forms by junior doctors and , non operating surgeons risks the validity of consent and may not offer full protection to the Doctors in face of litigation in the court of law.

Patients proper documentation of 73% positioning during surgery is better than study in UK by SARCO [22]. There was poor documentation of draping in 81% cases, 74% in solution used or skin preparation as found by other authors also [23].

The prophylactic use of intra procedural antibiotic recorded in only 81.6% in our study is comparable to other studies findings [3,24,25] .Inconsistency and lack of antibiotic dosage documentation was found in many cases and neither any mention was made of repeat antibiotic used for prolonged surgery.

Tourniquet use was recorded in 30.6% cases but the record was silent on timing and pressure applied. Similar findings were found in other studies [8,24,25].

Surgical approach and incision type were specified in 74% cases is comparable to the 60.8% [6] , 80.1% [24] in other studies. Operative findings were documented in only 74.2% cases in our study compared to other studies in the literature where operative findings were missing in 57.5% [6], 56%[16] and 80.1% [24] .

Operative complications were not recorded in 26.4% cases which is similar to other studies where poor documentation in detailing complications was found [7,9,16,24,26], but far higher than that the 2.5% of Kawa et al [6].

Documentation of extra surgical procedures performed were not recorded in 40.6% of cases and in 78.5% cases of tissues removed which compared favourably with those of other authors. [6,9,15,18,25,26] .

This study 62.6% recorded usage of Implants and prosthesis is higher than the 30% in other studies attributably resultant of poor documentation [8,22,24,25].

Type of fluid and irrigation used was documented well in 80.4% cases, surgical wound closure was 89% and incomplete details of [3,6,7,9,13,14] .

There was poor documentation of intra operative blood loss in 88.6% comparable to other studies [23,26,27].

Majority of orthopedic trauma surgery is done under fluoroscopy but the radiation exposure time and number of exposure shots were documented.

The post operative instructions written in 96.6% of the cases than the reported lower percentage in other studies[3,6,9,14,15]. In our study, the post operative rounds were led by senior doctor in 84.2% cases in contrast to Rowland's et al [28] reported less percentage of post operative rounds by senior doctors at Consultant level.

In Summary there is no perfect model for faultless operation notes documentation in different surgical specialties however strategies can be adopted by different institutions for improving operation notes writing but since the basic guidelines remain the same .

Improvement in documentation of operation notes can be further enhanced by

--- Provision of operation note Performa's or Aide memoire for better documentation of notes[ as earlier noted by other authors 9.10.20.26]

--- Introduction of electronic smart note templates with previously highlighted advantages elsewhere in this write up [10,14]

Hand written notes were not admissible in the court of law in medico legal cases[5,12,13]

---Implementation of training and retraining programme in structured training in operation note documentation to new and old staff members is sine qua non to reduction or total elimination gaps in documentation .

---Frequent supervision of junior surgeons by senior surgeons in operation note documentation .

---Avoidance of abbreviations in note keeping and in diagnosis

### **Limitations of Study :**

--It is a retrospective study done in one hospital by single operator moreover Hawthorne effect cannot be excluded .

-- Many variables obtained from patients file through Hospital computerised data , thereby limiting the number, quality, and completeness of variables that can be obtained in some cases.

### **Conclusion :**

Our study identified both areas of poor documentation in certain areas as well as positive elements in other areas as compared to RCSE 2008 guidelines .Also areas where we need improvement were identified and can be improved and monitored by periodic auditing.

The adoption of operative note performance as contained in the RCS guidelines will ensure global best medical practice

Formal inclusion of operative note writing in the curriculum at early stage of surgical training will in the long run improve documentation and patient care.

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**Table 1 RCSE 2008 Parameters :**

1.Patient Name
2.Date of Birth
3.Hospital number
4.Date of operation
5.Time of operation
6.Elective /Emergency Procedure

7.Name of Surgeon
8.Name of assistant
9.Name of operation
10.Incision
11.Operative findings
12 Intra operative complications
13. Any extra procedure performed and reason
14 Details of tissue removed, added or altered
15 Identification of prosthesis or materials used
16. Details of closure technique
17. Post-operative care instructions
18. Signature of surgeon

**Table 2 Additional Variables not included in the RCSE guidelines**

19. Age and gender
20. ICD – coding
21.Final Diagnosis

22. Indication for operation
23. Consent Obtained by Operating surgeons
24. Prophylactic antibiotics
25. Preparation: Positioning , Skin preparation
26. Type of irrigation
27. Tourniquet time
28. Estimated blood loss

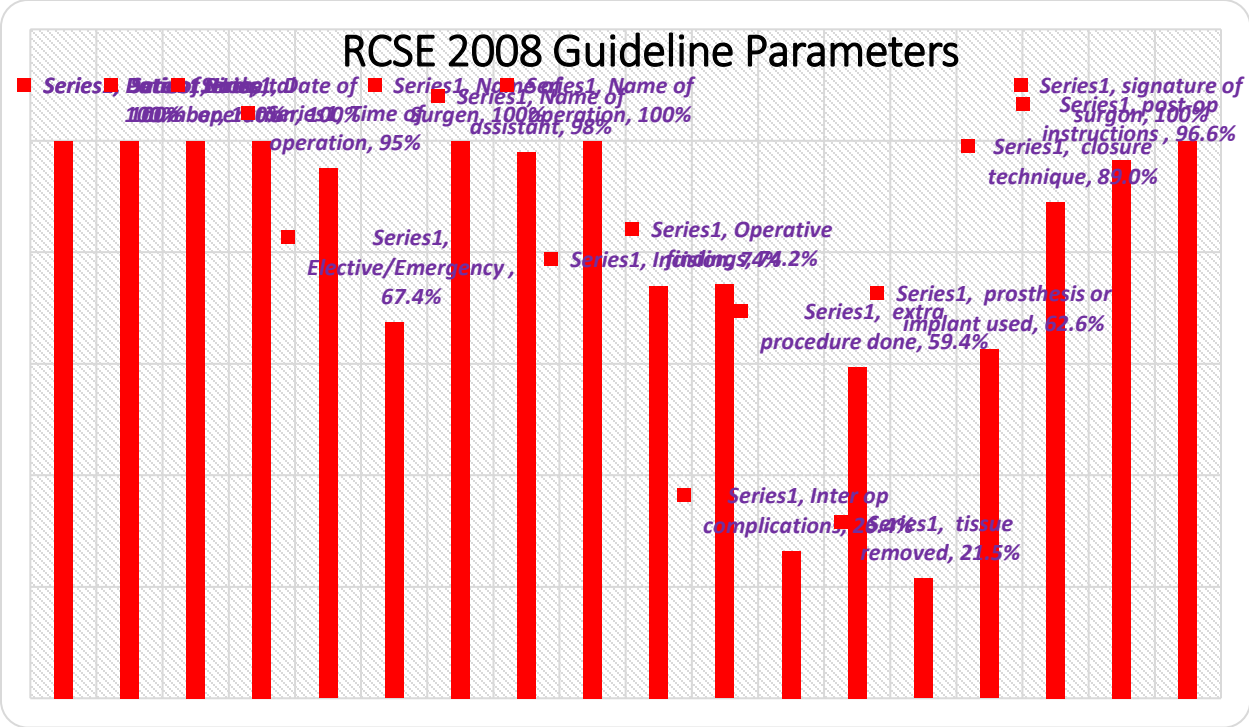


Fig 1: RCSE 2008 Guideline Parameters

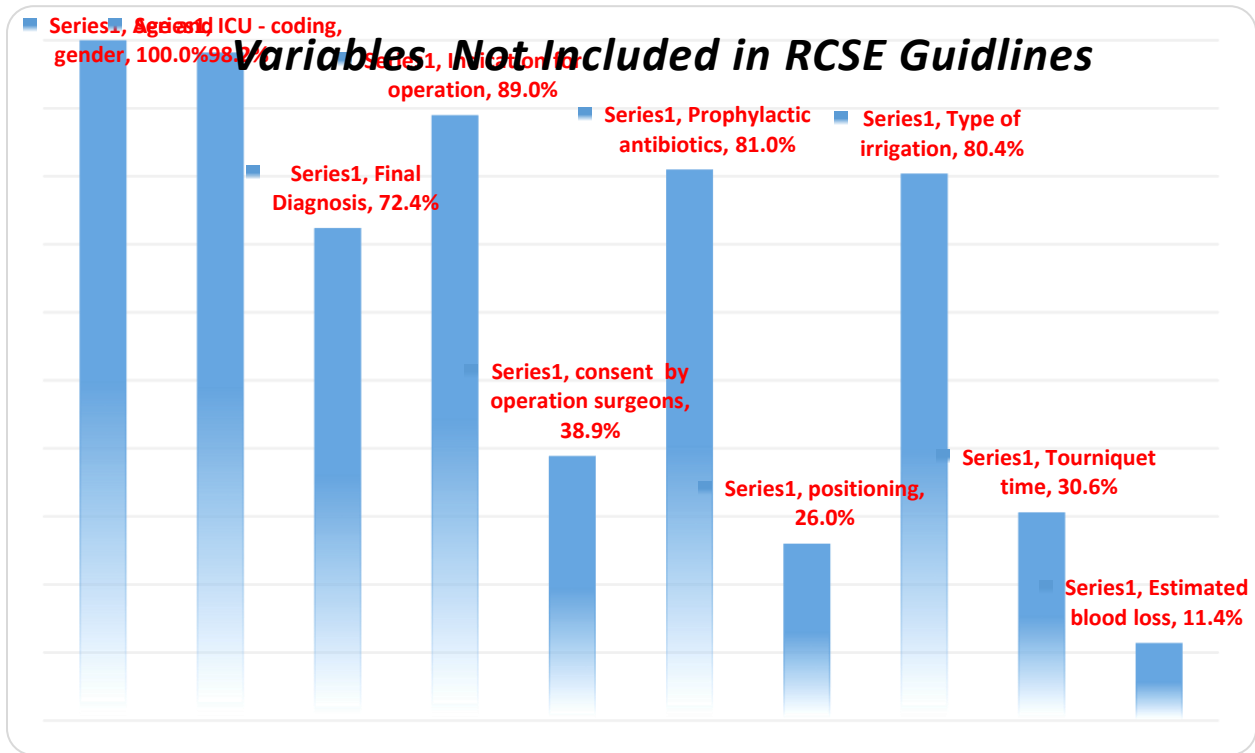


Fig 2:Variables Not Included in RCSE Guidelines