

WHO Surgical Safety Checklist in comparison with Universal Protocol

The Joint Commission would like to clarify its expectations of compliance with the Universal Protocol both in comparison with the World Health Organization (WHO) Surgical Safety Checklist and with recent modifications to the Universal Protocol.

Recently, the WHO released its Surgical Safety Checklist. There have been questions regarding whether this checklist can fulfill the requirements of The Joint Commission's Universal Protocol. The requirements of the Universal Protocol and the WHO checklist do not conflict. However, they were created for different purposes, so there is not a one-to-one comparison between the two documents. Some of the differences include the following:

- The Universal Protocol aims to prevent wrong site, wrong procedure, and wrong person surgeries, and it focuses on those issues in great detail.
- The WHO Surgical Safety

Checklist aims to promote safe surgery, and it addresses other aspects of surgery.

- Both the Universal Protocol and the WHO checklist cover preprocedure verification, site marking, and a time-out before the procedure. However, the WHO checklist includes unique issues such as postprocedure sign-out while the Universal Protocol contains more details about the performance of the time-out.

While not in conflict, compliance with the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist does not ensure compliance with the Universal Protocol. Accredited health care organizations are still required to meet all elements of performance of the Universal Protocol.

The Joint Commission has also received comments from accredited organizations about the practical implications of complying with recent modifications to the Universal Protocol. In response to these concerns,

The Joint Commission has been reviewing the Universal Protocol to determine if refinements are needed. During the first quarter of 2009, The Joint Commission sought input from professional organizations, health care providers, and accredited organizations. Based on this input, The Joint Commission is modifying the Universal Protocol. The revised Universal Protocol was sent to the field for review in May.

Until modifications are approved and implemented, Joint Commission-accredited hospitals and ambulatory care facilities, as well as organizations in the disease-specific care certification program, are still expected to comply with the requirements of the Universal Protocol. Please direct any questions to the Standards Interpretation Group at 630/792-5900 or via the online form at <http://www.jointcommission.org/Standards/OnlineQuestionForm>.