



LETTERS

THE SURGEON AS PUPPETEER

The puppetry of modern operating theatres

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The idea of the surgeon as puppeteer may be overly simplistic.¹ The strings of Japanese Bunraku puppetry and surgical suturing are visible, whereas the strings of the puppetry that drives the safe and effective functioning of modern operating theatres are hidden and handled by all in the wider multidisciplinary team. These are interpersonal strings, which are just as prone to snapping, fraying, or tripping up the unwary. Human factors can place these moving strings under tension, affecting the ease of team interactions and so influencing the quality of patient care.

Most surgeons subscribe to a culture of collaboration that is fundamental to effective team working. They also recognise that the running of an operating theatre team needs the same psychological attention and dexterity as the honed fine motor skills required to operate.

Staff morale is wavering widely across the NHS, and public perception is highly sensitive to journalistic imagery. We need to replace caricatures with messaging that better promotes public understanding and appreciation of the intricate interplay between surgeons, anaesthetists, operating department practitioners, nurses, and other allied healthcare staff that direct the coordinated motion of patients throughout their surgical journey.

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1 Shepherd A. The surgeon as puppeteer. *BMJ* 2019;364:l1146. 10.1136/bmj.l1146 30872282

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