

Improving documentation standards in upper limb tendon surgery

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Introduction

Clear and structured operation notes are essential in hand surgery. Poor documentation can delay therapy and affect patient outcomes. Evidence shows that using templates boosts compliance from **71% to 100%**. This project audits tendon repair operation notes at Northern Health and evaluates the impact of introducing a structured template.

Aim

To improve documentation of flexor and extensor tendon repair operation notes, supporting effective communication and timely hand therapy.

Methods

- **Design:** Retrospective audit
- **Guidelines:** Northern Health & Royal College of Surgeons
- **Period:** Jan 2023 – Dec 2024
- **Phases:** Pre-template (Jan 2023 – Jun 2024) vs. Post-template (Jul – Dec 2024)
- **Process:** Development of an online documentation template; survey of hand therapists to assess whether improved notes reduced clarification needs, saved time, enabled earlier therapy, and enhanced therapy quality.

Results:

Pre-template (90 reports)

- Overall compliance: **81.7%**
- Strong: Surgeon name (**98.8%**), Anaesthetic type (**95.5%**), % tendon injury (**94.4%**)
- Weak: Injury zone (**64.4%**), Repair type (**56.6%**), Repair quality (**47.7%**)
- Flexor-specific: **19.4%**
- Extensor-specific: **1.8%**

Post-template (36 reports)

- Overall compliance: **↑ to 97.8%**
- Flexor-specific: **↑ to 66.7%**
- Extensor-specific: **↑ to 14.3%**

Six categories reached **100% adherence**:

- Surgeon name
- Anaesthetic type
- Side (R/L)
- Repair technique
- Closure material
- % tendon injury

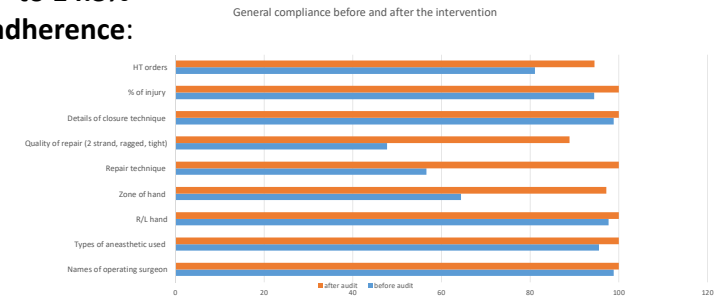


Figure 1: Findings Pre and Post Implementation of Template

This figure shows key improvements after implementing the template, including better consistency, accuracy, and completeness of documentation. The template helped streamline processes and reduce errors, demonstrating its positive impact on data quality and workflow efficiency.

Hand Therapist Feedback

- **100%:** Fewer delays, less need for clarification, earlier therapy
- **50%:** Still wanted more operative detail

Conclusion:

Templates significantly enhance documentation quality and consistency in upper limb tendon surgery, addressing key areas such as injury detail, repair specifics, and therapy directives. These improvements support clearer communication with hand therapists, reduce delays in treatment, and facilitate earlier rehabilitation. While results from this single-centre audit are promising, larger-scale and long-term studies are needed to determine the sustainability and broader applicability of these findings.

References:

1. Theivendran K, Hassan S, I Clark D. Improving the quality of operative notes by implementing a new electronic template for upper limb surgery at the Royal Derby Hospital. *BMJ Open Quality* 2016;5:u208727.w3498. doi:10.1136/bmjquality.u208727.w34983.
2. RCS England. Record your work clearly, accurately and legibly [Internet]. [cited 2024 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/standards-and-research/gsp/domain-1/1-3-record-your-work-clearly-accurately-and-legibly/>