

WhatsApp: Is it a solution to daily human resources management in institutional practice?

Sir,

Managing the manpower in teaching hospitals with senior residents and trainees requires professionalism. Unplanned absence of residents delays equipment check, basic theatre preparation and a subsequent delay in anaesthetic management of patients. Effective and timely communication is an absolute requirement for smooth functioning. Smartphones are commonplace amongst doctors and are often relied upon.^[1] Instant messaging system like WhatsApp has helped in linking groups of people in an easy and interactive way.^[2] Based on our previous experience, we found WhatsApp an effective medium for resident communication^[3] and decided to incorporate it for resident's daily postings. Delayed start has been implicated as a significant component of unutilised operative room (OR) time in many studies,^[4] with late arrival being implicated as a common reason for anaesthetic delay.^[5] One can argue that such delays should be communicated by phone, as traditionally practiced, but communication in a group alerts many at the same time and can be more effective

A WhatsApp group was created with all residents and the staff member in charge of the daily roster, the Rota in Charge (RIC). We have around ninety residents who are spread out in two major theatre complexes (total of 16 theatres) and a day care complex, in addition to remote diagnostic locations, pain services, intensive care and recovery room.

The RIC would post the list of consultants covering various locations the previous day in addition to the residents list, accounting for post-call off and sanctioned leaves and in line with their monthly postings. It was mandatory to post any kind of leave, including last minute, unexpected leave and potential delays in reaching the hospital on the group, and this led to success in this initiative. Although we do not have historical data to compare with, delay in start of OR due to the absence of anaesthesia resident has been none in the last 1 year, which was not the case in the past. In addition, WhatsApp is an excellent repository^[6] for clerical staff to refer to. They were added later to the group to ensure that all leaves were accounted for in record.

The drawback of the system is that it is time-consuming and needs the RIC attention after working hours and early in the morning. We hope that in future, we have an application based automated system to minimise the human effort required.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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