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## POSITION STATEMENT

### Risk Management

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#### Objective

The objective of this Position Statement is to describe the relevance and summarise the principles of risk management in the context of the safe practise of anaesthesia. A brief explanation of the application of risk management and associated processes together with references for further research concludes the statement.

#### Preamble

Anaesthetists, by the nature of their professional responsibilities practise risk management. The more the practice is embedded as a cultural norm the more effective the management of risk becomes. Risk management provides an framework to analyse processes and situations with the intent of either minimising the potential for risk or maximising the practitioner's awareness of the risk prior to an adverse event. This enables contingent actions to be planned, rehearsed and implemented – to mitigate adverse impacts.

Risk management, continuous improvement and quality are particularly interrelated concepts in the context of health services and patient safety. Applying these concepts is good professional practice. Risk management is defined as the culture, processes and structures that are directed towards the effective management of potential opportunities and adverse effects<sup>1</sup>.

#### Cultural Changes

Risk management is applicable to any process or situation where a level of risk exposure is unacceptable. Risks include, but are not limited to:

- Patient safety.
- Physical safety of colleagues and staff.
- Property or asset damage.
- Adverse media reporting.
- Financial loss.

- Patient and or family dissatisfaction.
- Corporate reputation.

Risk management is most effective when it is embedded culturally such as the use of a team approach for mutual support. Good risk management means anaesthetists:

- Comprehend and practise the process of risk analysis.
- Communicate effectively and frequently with their team and patients.
- Use documented standard procedures and check lists.
- Record events routinely.
- Maintain contingency plans.
- Regularly rehearse plans and procedures.

#### Benefit of Risk Management

1. Encourages doctors to provide the safest and highest quality of care for patients.
2. Gives doctors reassurance that they are providing 'best practice' for their patients.
3. Reduces the opportunities for litigation.
4. Improves the defensibility of any claim.
5. By being well informed, doctors' professional and financial needs are satisfied.
6. Rewards doctors who are creative and innovative in healthcare and practice management.
7. Reassures patients and the public that due professional diligence is being exercised.

#### Principles

These principles of risk management are provided to guide members in their management of their clinical practice. The principles should be applied bearing in mind the relative context of the event. They are derived from Australian and international literature dealing with the concept of risk management with an emphasis on the health-care industry.

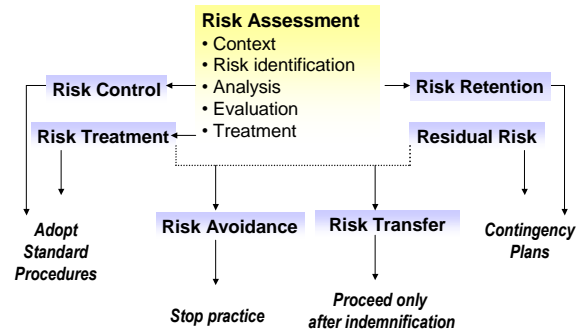
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<sup>1</sup> AS/NZS 4360:1999 Section 1.3

- Every clinical or administrative process is subject to risk, that is, there is a possibility of danger, loss, injury or other adverse outcome as a result of an action taken or not taken.
- Assume error is inherent in a process (if something can go wrong, it will).
- The best person to conduct a risk assessment is the person responsible for delivering the process.
- Risk management identifies opportunities as much as mitigating or avoiding adverse outcomes.
- The anaesthetist is responsible for managing risk in his or her own environment.
- Anaesthetists have more than one option in managing a risk – including not accepting unnecessary risks.

### Application of Risk Management

1. Risks assessment starts with determining the context of the situation or circumstances. What may be appropriate in metropolitan hospital may not be appropriate in an isolated rural environment.
2. The risk is determined from an examination of the processes and practitioners’ experiences. Ask: what, how and when to identify potential risks.
3. Each identified risk has a different likelihood and consequence – combined these may have minimal or catastrophic effect.
4. Assess risks by priority of impact. Focus first on those risks with the most severe impact.
5. Decide on a treatment option that is appropriate for the context. Options for treating a risk are shown in the following figure.



### References

Further information on risk management is available from websites including the Australian Society of Anaesthetists, Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland and the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

References from Standards Australia include:

Guidelines for Managing Risk in Healthcare HB 228: 2001, Risk Management AS/NZS 4360:2004

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