

BAOS Bulletin

Wrong tooth extraction removed from Never Event List February 2021

NHS Improvement updated its Never Events list February 2021 and has excluded 'the removal of the wrong tooth'.

NHS Improvement defines surgical wrong site surgery as an invasive procedure performed on the wrong patient or at the wrong site (e.g. wrong knee, eye, limb). The incident is detected at any time after the start of the procedure.

NHS Improvement says that whilst the extraction of a tooth is an invasive procedure undertaken in a variety of settings, despite national and local efforts to introduce safety standards for invasive procedures, these have not been considered strong enough to prevent errors continuing to occur. They have therefore excluded the removal of the wrong tooth from its list of Never Events. A lack of standardisation in types of tooth notation and difficulties with site marking are noted.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2018-Never-Events-List-updated-February-2021.pdf>

The 'Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch' (HSIB) also recommends removal of the wrong tooth extraction from the list of Never Events. HSIB conducts independent investigations of patient safety concerns in NHS-funded care across England and is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and hosted by NHS England and NHS Improvement.

<https://www.hsib.org.uk/investigations-cases/wrong-site-surgery-wrong-tooth-extraction/>

Wrong site extraction is still classified as a Patient Safety Incident and should continue to be reported and managed as such.

NHS Improvement had already removed 'Local anaesthetic blocks for dental procedures.' from its Never Events list in May 2019, so there are now no specific dental Never Events listed.

The Never Event policy and framework is designed to support the NHS in learning from what goes wrong in healthcare. This requires a culture of openness and honesty to ensure that staff and patients feel supported to speak up in a constructive way. In my own experience, not all staff involved in removal of a wrong tooth have felt supported as they would have expected. We still have much work to do to create a truly 'no blame' culture. In this regard I personally welcome the removal of wrong tooth extraction removed from Never Event List. NHS Improvement had its own concerns in 2018 and decided not to impose financial sanctions associated with Never Events because it might have reinforced the perception of a 'blame culture'.

However, much excellent work and important progress has been made over recent years that has significantly reduced the incidence of wrong tooth extraction. This should be recognised. The development and introduction of surgical safety checklists specific to oral surgery has been important in reducing patient harm. It is important that we continue to use, promote and refine these.

Professor Paul Coulthard

BAOS President, and behalf of BAOS Council

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