

PODIUM 2.3 -- 10:30-10:45 [10-min presentation followed by 5-min Q&A]

Understanding Surgeons' Experience of Flow

Sydney McQueen,¹ Dr. Aidan McParland,² Melanie Hammond Mobilio¹ & Dr. Carol-anne Moulton¹

¹The Wilson Centre, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

²University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

sydney.mcqueen@mail.utoronto.ca

Background: The state of cognitive flow has been linked with enhanced performance, happiness, career satisfaction, and decreased burnout. However, while elite sport has long revered and trained athletes to enter flow states, the concept has not been adopted strongly in healthcare. Furthermore, flow has primarily been explored from a unidimensional (cognitive) perspective, without much attention to other aspects. The present study sought to understand the experience of flow among surgeons through a multidimensional lens.

Methods: Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 staff surgeons at the University of Toronto, purposively sampled for experience levels and practices. Data were coded and analyzed iteratively by three researchers until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Results: Although many surgeons had not previously heard of cognitive flow, the phenomenon deeply resonated with most. Participants described different physical, cognitive, emotional, sociocultural, and environmental components that interacted to shape the subjective experience of flow:

"I think that there are many different facets of [flow] that don't always come together all at the same time, you may feel different parts of it at different times depending on what the kind of case is, who your help is, if you recently had a complication, all of those things play into your [flow] state." (P4)

Conclusions: Understanding flow in clinical practice may lead to new avenues for enhancing career satisfaction, combating burnout, and promoting physician wellness.