

Maximising Training Opportunities by Reducing Cancelled Operations

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Introduction:

Viral swabs for Covid-19 are now an essential part of a patient's pre-operative checklist. Patients require negative swabs before proceeding to theatre. Delay in this process may lead to a cancelled operation with physical and mental health implications for the patient. There is a knock-on effect on surgical training, with fewer procedures and operations for teaching.

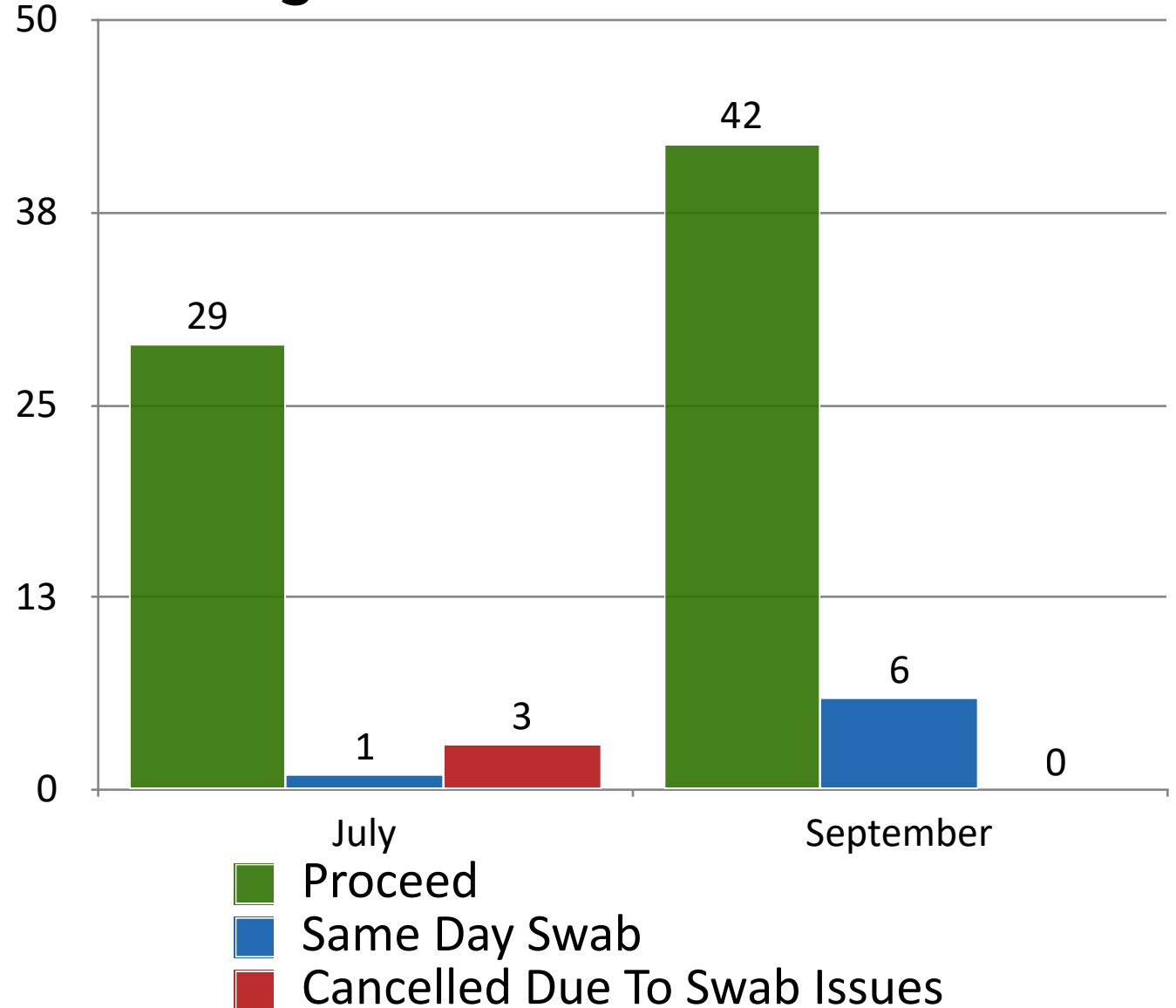
Methods:

Previous guidance required 2 staggered swabs prior to admission. This was simplified on 19th August 2020 to a single pre-operative swab. A retrospective audit was established within the Otolaryngology department at the Royal Gwent Hospital to assess whether the simplification of guidance reduced the rate of cancellations and the number of same-day swabs needed to maintain operating.

Results:

In a 4 week period in July 2020 prior to the simplification in guidance there were 34 listed procedures, 3 of which were cancelled due to swab related issues. 1 patient required a same-day swab to facilitate surgery. In a 4 week period in September 2020 after the simplification in guidance there were 48 listed operations and no cancellations due to swab issues. 6 patients required same-day swabs to facilitate surgery. (See figure 1).

Figure 1: Patients proceeding to theatre, use of urgent swabs and cancellations



Discussion:

Whilst the simplification of swab guidance has reduced the rate of cancelled operations the reliance on same-day swabs to maintain operating has increased. This could reflect better availability of same-day swabs.

Conclusion:

It is in the interest of trainees to ensure that patients are fully prepared for operations pre-operatively to minimise unplanned cancellations, associated patient harm and loss of training opportunities.

Learning Points:

- Simplification of swab guidelines may reduce cancellations.
- Same-day swabs appear to be increasingly relied upon to maintain operating.