



HELLO
my name is

Badges: A simple solution for safer surgery

Knowing who's who in healthcare settings is key to improving the experience for patients and medics, reveals **Danielle Checketts**

Ever been in a situation when you can remember someone's face but not their name? To prevent this in healthcare, the 'Hello, my name is' badge campaign has been implemented in most UK wards and departments – but in surgery, this isn't as easy.

Clear communication is the foundation of safe, effective healthcare and the Department

of Health estimates that up to 70% of adverse events are caused by miscommunication.

One major reason for this is the lack of clear identification among healthcare professionals. When staff are easily recognised by names and roles, it not only improves patient safety but also strengthens teamwork and builds trust between patients and the people caring for them.

The safer surgery checklist advocates that team introductions

are made between all staff before skin incision. That's all well and good but remembering up to 15 individuals' names and roles during the day can be challenging.

Since its launch more than a decade ago, the 'Hello, my name is' campaign has transformed healthcare interactions. By promoting clear introductions among staff, it's created a culture of respect, empathy and professionalism. Patients feel more comfortable when they know who is caring for them, while healthcare teams experience improved collaboration and communication. It promotes a respectful workplace culture where staff feel valued, boosting morale and accountability. When staff need to rely on memory recall and forget the names of staff they're working with, microaggressions can be formed and conflict can occur.

In settings such as operating theatres, catheterisation labs and radiology, staff wear sterile gowns that cover standard name badges. Lanyards are often tucked away in pockets and it's difficult to tell staff apart.

This lack of clear identification can have serious consequences. Patients may not know who to speak to, hesitate to ask questions or direct concerns to the wrong person. Misidentification slows down care and risks patient safety.

Rita's story is just one example. After having surgery on her foot, she tried several times to tell

a nurse she could still feel pain. She later learned she should have told the anaesthetist but no one wore name badges, so she couldn't tell who was who.

There's a practical solution. Theatre hats offer a visible way to identify clinicians, even when scrubbed in. Since 2018, what began with a nurse and anaesthetist writing names on their hats has grown into a global movement called the 'Theatre Cap Challenge'. A simple glance above the eyes is all it takes to know who someone is and what they do. Writing on disposable hats evolved into embroidered hats, then reusable hats with detachable name badges, enabling central laundering and providing a sustainable alternative.

Maternity theatres are high-pressure settings where clear communication is vital for the safety of both mother and baby. Lack of staff identification can heighten maternal anxiety, erode trust and discourage open communication.

My own experiences during the delivery of my two children in theatres highlighted how impersonal care can feel when you don't know who is present. This uncertainty makes it harder to ask questions or express concerns. I desperately wanted to see the lovely lady who held my hand as my epidural was administered but all I saw was a sea of blue scrubs and hats – no names and no roles were visible.

Surgical team during the trial of the name badge hats



A 2019 report for Health Education England by the CIEHF described the positive impact of the theatre cap initiative. One midwife, new to her organisation, found that wearing a personalised cap changed her colleagues' behaviour: they addressed her by name, improving her confidence and helping her focus. This inclusion also spread to neonatal staff, who appreciated the clarity provided in emergencies and during structured handovers such as SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation).

Personalised caps enabled better teamwork, accountability and, ultimately, patient safety.

Another significant issue is the barrier to speaking up. Healthcare operates within a structured hierarchy, where senior professionals such as consultants and surgeons hold authority over junior staff. While hierarchy is necessary for decision-making and accountability, it can inadvertently create an environment where junior staff feel hesitant to voice concerns or challenge decisions if they're unsure of the hierarchy or who is leading the procedure. This can result in missed opportunities to prevent errors. A lack of clear identification creates hierarchical barriers, reducing collaboration.

Clear identification of names and roles improves the human side of healthcare by easing pressure on memory, helping communication flow more smoothly and supporting safer decision-making. When staff are easily recognised, especially in fast-paced settings such as theatres, it becomes easier to collaborate, speak up and respond quickly to changes.

Patients feel more confident and involved when they know who is caring for them. Junior staff are more likely to voice concerns and team members are more comfortable working together. This builds a more respectful, inclusive culture that encourages accountability and trust. These

changes lead to fewer mistakes, better teamwork and safer care.

At Somerset Hospital, the introduction of Eco Ninjas badge hats led to a significant shift in how staff and patients experienced daily interactions. Before the rollout, only 41% of colleagues could reliably identify names and roles. After adopting the badge hats, that figure soared to 96%.

Identification became seamless. Staff weren't just recognised; they felt seen. Visitors, including radiographers, reps, clinical scientists and student nurses and doctors also wore badge hats, creating an environment where every role was visible and no one felt like a stranger.

Patients found it easier to speak to the right person. Teams collaborated more smoothly and tension from miscommunication virtually disappeared. Staff reported a stronger sense of accountability and trust, with clearer role clarity reducing friction and increasing efficiency.

Ensuring that every healthcare professional is fully identified is a critical patient safety measure. By improving identification methods, hospitals can reduce miscommunication, enhance teamwork and build stronger relationships between staff and patients – and improve human factors. As healthcare continues to evolve, prioritising effective identification will remain vital in delivering safe, high-quality care. ■

About the author

Danielle Checketts is a former medical professional who transitioned away from nursing after raising concerns to advocate for patient safety. She is the co-founder of Eco Ninjas, designed to enhance communication in operating theatres, aimed at reducing errors and improving patient outcomes.