

# Early Career Nurses’ Perceptions of Quality and Safety in the Operating Room

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## ABSTRACT

With a shortage of experienced operating room nurses across America, novice nurses are being hired to fill vacancies. Over thirty percent of operating room nurses have fewer than 5 years of experience. In juxtaposition to the operating room nurse shortage are societal expectations that healthcare quality, safety, and accessibility will improve, and healthcare costs will be contained. In the circulating role, operating room registered nurses are positioned to collaboratively create a safe environment for surgery because they are situated to identify problems, plan improvements, and measure and monitor solutions that will improve care quality. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the circulating role develop during a 6 to 12 months orientation period. Over 2500 operating rooms license *Periop 101: A Core Curriculum* to standardize specialty orientation and shorten duration which requires a significant financial commitment by the employer. There is a gap in knowledge about how early career operating room nurses experience the impact of Periop 101 on their quality and safety knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A qualitative descriptive design was selected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from a purposive sample of operating room nurses to collect descriptions of experiences with operating room nursing quality and safety. Inductive coding and thematic analysis was undertaken using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. Participants were viewed as learners who constructed a unique body of knowledge, developed skills, and formed attitudes about OR quality and safety during their initial orientation year as they completed Periop 101. Participant competence as an early career nurse was viewed as a development stage along the spectrum of novice to expert.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over 100 million surgical procedures are performed annually in the United States (Weiss, Elixhauser, & Andrews, 2014; Mattingly, et al., 2021). During surgery, patients are cared for by a circulating registered nurse (ORRN) who works as an integral member of a multidisciplinary team to facilitate the quality and safety of their procedures. The (ORRN) is a specialist whose role is patient-centered and considered critical to ensure safety and support physical and psychological welfare across the perioperative experience (AORN, 2014). In 2009, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) projected a global nursing shortage, and although mitigation strategies have reduced shortages in some areas of the U.S., specialty areas such as the operating room (OR) continue to experience ORRN vacancies across the country (Bacon & Stewart, 2022; Ball, et al., 2015; Schmidt & Brown, 2019; Zinn, et al., 2012).

OR vacancies exist in part because experienced ORRNs are aging out of the profession. As they retire, there is potential for loss of intellectual and technical skill capital that may threaten delivery of high-quality safe care (Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses [AORN], 2015a; Bacon & Stewart, 2018; Brown, et al., 2018; Covell & Sidani, 2012). As experienced ORRNs retire, a dearth of experienced preceptors and mentors is predicted in many operating rooms (Bacon & Stewart, 2018). Novice nurses, including newly graduated RNs (NGRNs), are filling ORRN vacancies and will be precepted by early career ORRNs (Bacon & Stewart, 2018). Nurses have a professional ethical imperative to protect patient welfare (Bailes, et al., 2014). How early career ORRNs perceive and carry out quality and safety competencies is of importance to the welfare of surgical patients as well as their healthcare and health care organizations. The aims of this qualitative descriptive study were to describe the safety and quality perceptions and practices of early career ORRNs, and to capture what influences their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about quality and safety.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions of early career ORRNs who have completed the Periop 101 curriculum about quality and safety in the OR care setting ?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participant Pool & Sample selection

- 59 registered nurses volunteered (AORN, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- 13 met inclusion criteria
- 5 completed an interview

### Demographics of Participants

- No prior OR work or volunteer experience
- First nursing job after graduation from school
- Worked less than 4 years in OR
- Completed Periop 101 during orientation to OR
- Ages
  - 1 - < 25 yrs.
  - 4 - between 26-40 yrs.
- 100% female
- Academic background:
  - 3-Bachelors degree
  - 2-Associate degree
- Work setting:
  - 3-Inpatient OR
  - 2-Outpatient OR
- Workplace size – all worked in ORs with 4-10 OR suites

### Semistructured Interviews

- Audio recorded and transcribed with speech-to-text app
- NVivo R1 used to code, theme, organize data (Figure 1)

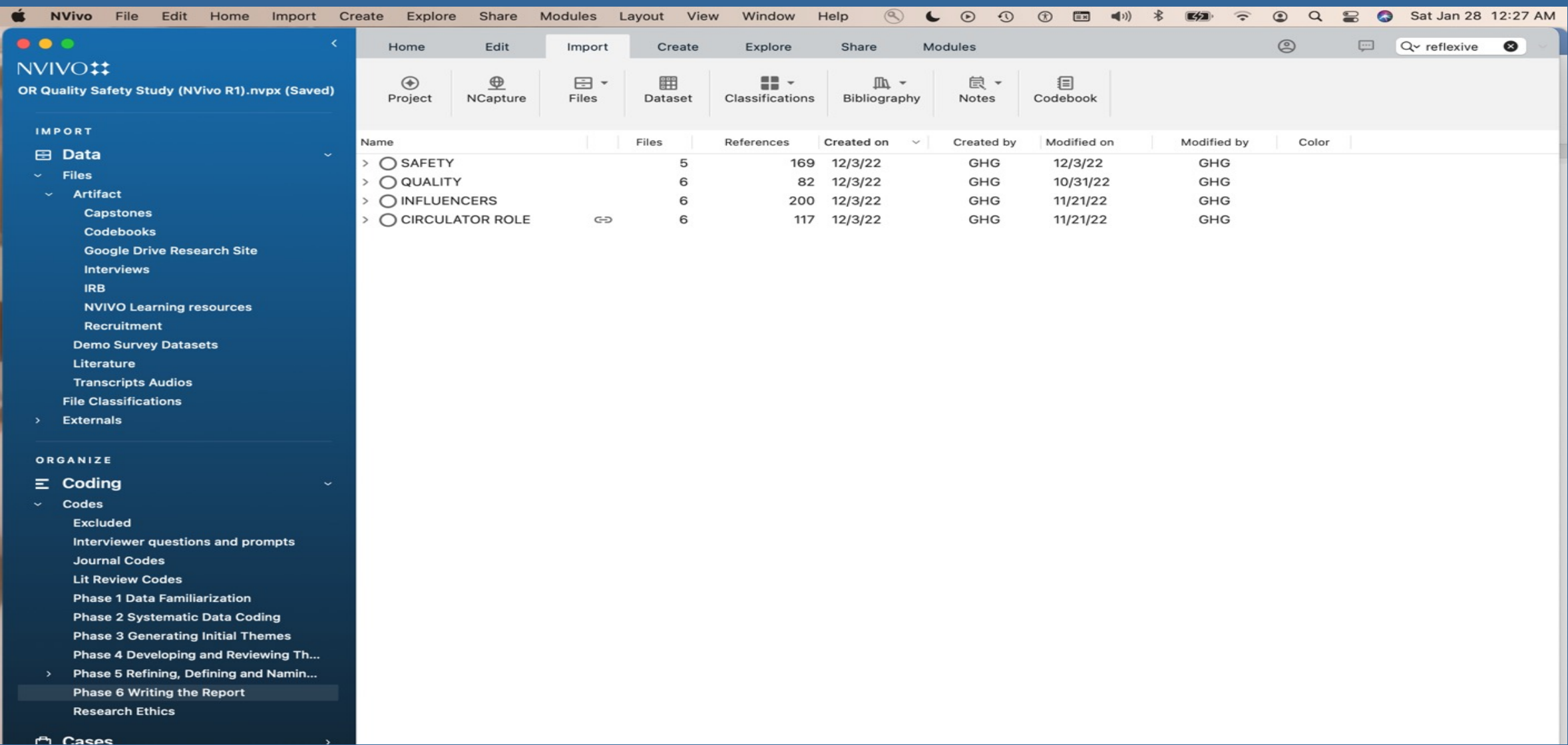


Figure 1. Screenshot NVivo file and code structure

## DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

The data analysis approach was modeled on six phases of reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2020).

- 1) familiarization with data
- 2) systematic data coding
- 3) generating initial themes
- 4) developing and reviewing themes
- 5) refining, defining, and naming themes
- 6) writing the report

Coding and themeing across six phases was conducted using the file structure for RTA demonstrated in NVivo by Meehan (2021).

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Existing themes:

- Safety
- Quality

Emerging Themes to date:

- Circulators play an integral Role
- Influencers

Although early career ORRNs have fewer than four years’ experience as circulators, some recognize areas of perioperative practice where their nursing actions may impact safety and quality of patient care, and refer to importance of following steps, directions, and standards, double-checking work, and maintaining relationships with team members who they accounted were integral to safety and quality. Participants were conscious of their roles in creating and maintaining care, recognized obstacles to ensuring safe high-quality care, and attributed influences from a variety of factors on safety and quality. Detailed results will be reported with the final interpretation of the findings in PROQUEST after dissertation requirements are completed.

## REFERENCES

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1faujvKpnkRqCvI2PDIN0c4MXM3i16wEU/view?usp=sharing>