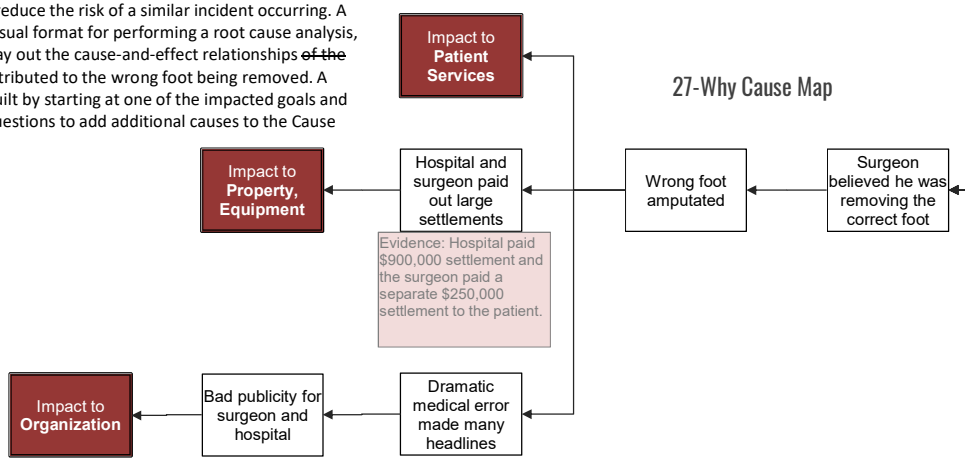
The Infamous Case of Willie King -Wrong Foot Amputated

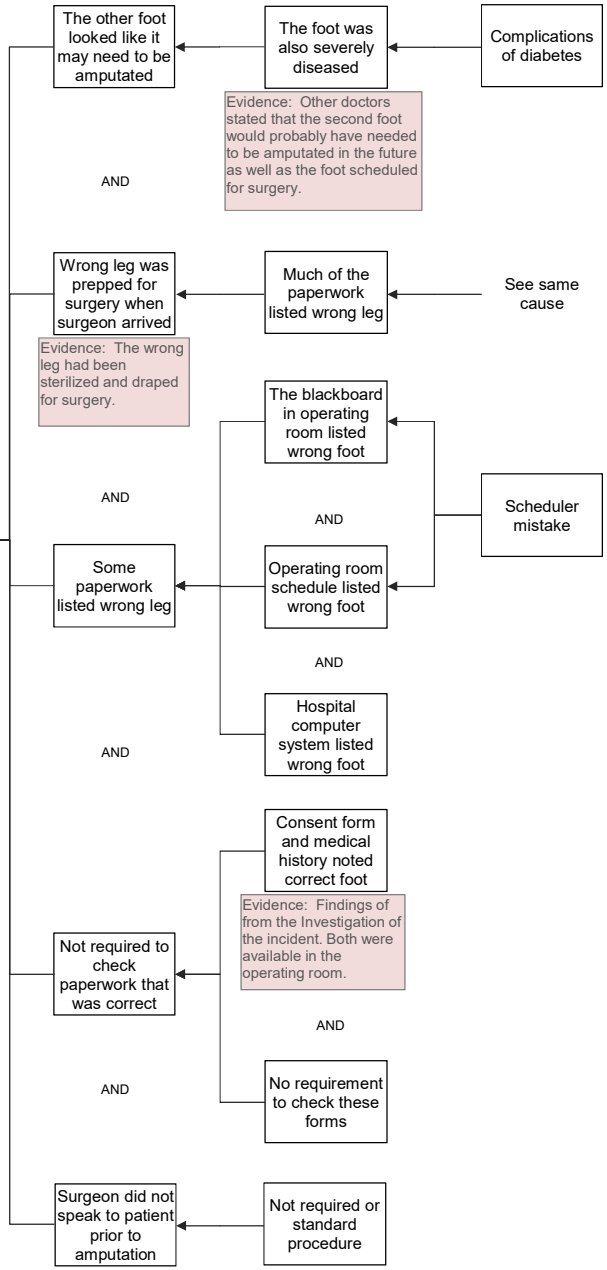
On February 20, 1995, Willie King, a 51 year old suffering from diabetes-related circulatory disease, was scheduled to have a foot amputated. During the operation, the surgeon realized that he was in the process of removing the wrong foot, but he was too far into the procedure to stop. This infamous case of wrong site surgery made national headlines and inspired long term changes to operating procedures to reduce the risk of a similar mistake occurring again.

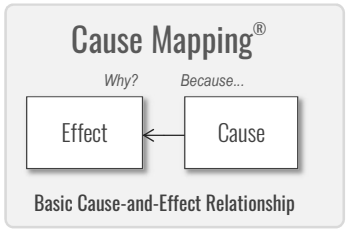
Performing a root cause analysis

Performing a root cause analysis of past incidents and working to thoroughly understand what caused them can aid in developing work processes that reduce the risk of a similar incident occurring. A Cause Map, a visual format for performing a root cause analysis, can intuitively lay out the cause-and-effect relationships ~~of the causes~~ that contributed to the wrong foot being removed. A Cause Map is built by starting at one of the impacted goals and asking "why" questions to add additional causes to the Cause Map



27-Why Cause Map





Consequences and impacts

This incident made national headlines. The surgeon was widely vilified and ridiculed for amputating the wrong foot and both he and the hospital where it occurred received significant negative publicity. The doctor was fined and had his license suspended for two years. The media reported that the hospital paid a $900,000 settlement and the surgeon paid a separate $250,000 settlement to the patient.

The hospital also made a number of long term changes designed to reduce the error of future wrong site surgery. A double back-up identification system, a computerized error-tracking system and the addition of patient safety officers through the facility were all implemented. Florida, the state where the incident occurred, also now requires surgeons to take a takeout prior to starting an operation where the whole surgical team must verify that they are conducting the correct surgery on the correct patient at the correct site. Additionally, surgeons are now required to meet with the patient while they are awake and mark the surgery site.

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