Table 1 Examples of operations linked to particular neuro-surgical devices

Operation	Medical device used
Ventricular drain	Perforator
Evacuation haematoma	Craniotome
Microdiscectomy	Operating microscope
Tumour surgery	Cavitron
Cervical spine surgery	Cervical plates/screws

We will need formal standards for all surgeons (including consultants). Prior to using a device that is new to that surgeon or if a wholly new device is introduced into a department, formal and documented training is required. We might recommend the following prior to operating solo: (i) attendance at a manufacturer's training course; (ii) assisting a competent surgeon; or (iii) being assisted by a competent surgeon.

A record of medical device training must be maintained: surgeons must operate within their documented competencies.

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COMMENT ON

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Microbial load and decontamination in the theatre suite

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This paper represents the latest in a line of publications down-playing the role of individual pre-operative preparation;^{1–4} we

would counsel caution. While individually each aspect (*e.g.* wearing hats, masks or overshoes) may be proven not to increase bacterial counts in operating theatres, we are concerned that cumulatively they may undermine the ethos of theatre being as sterile as possible. Which of us would choose to be operated on, or assisted by, a surgeon or scrub nurse who is hatless, ring-clad and wearing outdoor shoes?

As surgeons given the privilege of operating on patients, our primary concern should be our duty of care to the patient. It is our belief all possible sterile precautions should be undertaken, with a doctrine of such precautions being mandatory.

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AUTHORS' RESPONSE

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Whilst we agree whole-heartedly that sterile conditions are a must in theatre, we are sure that the authors would also agree that, in this era of evidence-based medicine when there is no evidence or even negative evidence for a practice that is taken for granted, then its validity must be questioned. We would suggest that many such 'traditional' practices are re-evaluated and would greatly appreciate the performance of further studies to improve the quality of the available scientific evidence.