

Aesop's Medical Fables And Other Fairy Tales: Transferring Morals From Pilots To Doctors

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Despite the increasing attention to safety and quality within health systems, clinical audit and review tools have not become an integral part of normal daily practice for medical practitioners.

However the Critical Incident technique, first used by pilots during the Second World War to analyse the root cause of catastrophic events, has been used successfully in the analysis of daily events in general practice. We interviewed general practice registrars about critical incidents (having both good and poor outcomes) which occurred during the first year of their training. We classified these events with the aim of identifying morals or lessons to be learnt.

We interviewed the same registrars later in their training and again sought to identify themes and morals from their experience. We were able to identify a new current of themes reflecting a commonality of learning from experience.

This simple technique has immediate applicability to daily clinical practice and can be used in routine peer review within and across disciplines. Themes and morals provide valuable information about areas which need attention in service delivery.