


RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Trauma quality indicators: internationally approved core factors for trauma management quality evaluation

Federico Coccolini<sup>1\*</sup> , Yoram Kluger<sup>2</sup>, Ernest E. Moore<sup>3</sup>, Ronald V. Maier<sup>4</sup>, Raul Coimbra<sup>5</sup>, Carlos Ordoñez<sup>6</sup>, Rao Ivatury<sup>7</sup>, Andrew W. Kirkpatrick<sup>8</sup>, Walter Biffi<sup>9</sup>, Massimo Sartelli<sup>10</sup>, Andreas Hecker<sup>11</sup>, Luca Ansaloni<sup>12</sup>, Ari Leppaniemi<sup>13</sup>, Viktor Reva<sup>14</sup>, Ian Civil<sup>15</sup>, Felipe Vega<sup>16</sup>, Massimo Chiarugi<sup>1</sup>, Alain Chichom-Mefire<sup>17,18</sup>, Boris Sakakushev<sup>19</sup>, Andrew Peitzman<sup>20</sup>, Osvaldo Chiara<sup>21</sup>, Fikri Abu-Zidan<sup>22</sup>, Marc Maegele<sup>23</sup>, Mario Miccoli<sup>24</sup>, Mircea Chirica<sup>25</sup>, Vladimir Khokha<sup>26</sup>, Michael Sugrue<sup>27</sup>, Gustavo P. Fraga<sup>28</sup>, Yasuhiro Otomo<sup>29</sup>, Gian Luca Baiocchi<sup>30</sup>, Fausto Catena<sup>31</sup> and the WSES Trauma Quality Indicators Expert Panel

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Quality in medical care must be measured in order to be improved. Trauma management is part of health care, and by definition, it must be checked constantly. The only way to measure quality and outcomes is to systematically accrue data and analyze them.

**Material and methods:** A systematic revision of the literature about quality indicators in trauma associated to an international consensus conference

**Results:** An internationally approved base core set of 82 trauma quality indicators was obtained: Indicators were divided into 6 fields: prevention, structure, process, outcome, post-traumatic management, and society integrational effects.

**Conclusion:** Present trauma quality indicator core set represents the result of an international effort aiming to provide a useful tool in quality evaluation and improvement. Further improvement may only be possible through international trauma registry development. This will allow for huge international data accrual permitting to evaluate results and compare outcomes.

**Keywords:** Performance, Product, Morbidity, Mortality, System, Analysis, Outcome, Data, Planning, World

## Background

Quality in medical care must be measured in order to be improved. Trauma management is part of health care, and by definition, it must be checked constantly. The only way to measure quality and outcomes is to systematically accrue data and analyze them. However, one of the main issues encountered in this activity is the

difficulty to obtain complete and affordable dataset. Health care systems as well as trauma systems are different. They are differently organized around the world; discrepancies exist between them. The profound differences in organizational models may reflect even in outcomes. The necessity to evaluate the quality of care in a local, national, and even international scale has been progressively considered more necessary in the last decades. Quality of care is characterized as “the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are

\* Correspondence: [federico.coccolini@gmail.com](mailto:federico.coccolini@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>General Emergency and Trauma Surgery Department, Pisa University Hospital, Via Paradisa, 2, 56124 Pisa, Italy

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



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consistent with the current professional knowledge” [1]. Measurement and feedback of performance are integral to the concept of a system of care [2, 3]. Since the early 1970s, the evidence of several deaths due to suboptimal trauma care in the USA has led to the development of structured trauma systems [4]. With the development of organizational models, the number of preventable deaths has progressively decreased [2]. Quality improvement evaluates the performance of both individual providers and the systems in which they work [1].

Evaluation of quality of the service offered by health systems may be measured with quality indicators (QI).

QI are performance measures designed to compare actual care against ideal criteria for the purposes of quality measurement, benchmarking, and identifying potential opportunities for improvement [5].

The US national system was the first in developing a structured trauma quality indicators (TQI) list and in providing several tools in order to continuously check and improve results. At present, many different TQI sets exist. However, concomitant existing significant variations in the utilization of indicators and limited evidence to support the use of specific indicators over others do not allow for an exchange in TQI within the different systems [5]. In fact, around the world, trauma systems are at different points in the organizational progression. TQI list generally adopted in a system cannot be entirely applied in a different one. Actually, no clearly defined and internationally approved TQI sets exist. However, a core set of universally applicable TQI that may be transversally adopted by all trauma systems is needed. Subcategories of indicators may then be elaborated and tailored according to dedicated system analysis.

The aim of this paper is to present a list of internationally approved core items for trauma management quality evaluation.

## Material and methods

A systematic revision of the literature about QI for evaluating trauma care was conducted. Researches were done on MEDLINE, Embase, CINAHL, Cochrane

Database of Systematic Reviews, Cochrane Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects, and Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials from the earliest available date through May 31, 2019. To increase the sensitivity of the search, the grey literature and select journals by hand were investigated, reference lists to identify additional studies were reviewed, and experts in the field were contacted. Moreover, websites of the major surgical and critical care societies worldwide were investigated for obtaining QI (American College of Surgeons, American Association for the Surgery of Trauma, Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma, Western Trauma Association, American Trauma Society, International Trauma Anesthesia, and Critical Care Society, British Trauma Society, Panamerican Trauma Society, Trauma Association of Canada, European Society for Trauma and Emergency Surgery, Australasian Trauma Society, Orthopedic Trauma Association, [Trauma.org](http://Trauma.org), the Society of Trauma Nurses). To further enlarge the research, also the main web search engines were utilized (i.e., Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Baidu) using the following search terms: trauma, quality, indicator, and injury.

All articles identifying and/or proposing 1 or more QI focusing on prehospital care, hospital care, posthospital care, or secondary injury prevention were considered.

Moreover, main world trauma centers' TQI lists were analyzed. All the identified QI lists were then analyzed in order to summarize all retrieved indicators.

Once all the QI were summarized, an international expert panel web-based consensus survey was done to obtain a balanced QI list. Two hundred experts from all the 5 continents and from all the 6 WHO regions were asked to express their evaluation of importance (0–10 marks, where 0 was not relevant and 10 was very important) about all the proposed QI. Items with  $\geq 70\%$  of preferences to values 8 to 10 have been accepted as important and passed through the next steps. During the survey, expert panel components had the opportunity to suggest further quality indicators they consider important and not present in the proposed list.

**Table 1** Prevention and structure indicators

Category	Subcategory	Indicators	Patients
Prevention		Activity to prevent and diffuse trauma risks and effect perception	All patients
		Measurement of injury risk perception and behavioral changes following sensibilization programs	All patients
		Psychological consequences in observers	All patients
		Copycat event prevention	All patients
		Direct medical cost quantification	All patients
		Indirect cost quantification	All patients
Structure	Center preparedness	Presence of data registry	All patients
		Staff training requirements	All patients

**Table 2** Process indicators (TTA Trauma Team Activation, GCS Glasgow Coma Scale, TBI traumatic brain injury, ED emergency department, AIS Abbreviated Injury Scale, ISS Injury Severity Score, CT computed tomography, TEG tromboelastography, ROTEM rotational thromboelastometry, ICU intensive care unit, EX-LAP explorative laparotomy, SBP systolic blood pressure, OR operating room, E-FAST extended focused assessment with sonography in trauma, REBOA resuscitative endovascular balloon occlusion of the aorta, CNS central nervous system)

Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Patients	
Process	Triage/ prehospital	Time to first medical contact (on scene)	All patients	
		Prehospital time	ISS > 16	
		Time to definitive trauma center	All patients	
		Acute pain management	Patients with documented pain assessment	
		Intubation of unconscious patients	Prehospital GCS < 9	
		Pelvic binder in pelvic fracture	Mechanically and/or hemodynamically unstable pelvic fractures (AIS 3-5)	
		Field triage rate (undertriage)	All patients	
	Emergency dept. management		Patient in shock with documented blood pressure who dies with no Emerg. Dept. thoracotomy or REBOA placement	Patients died in ER arrived with a documented blood pressure
			Trauma Team Activation (TTA)	Patients requiring TTA for whom TTA was activated
			Airway secured in ED for patients with GCS < 9	Patients with GCS < 9
			Tracheal intubation (GCS < 9)	Patients with GCS < 9
			Adequate rewarming measures for hypothermia (temperature $\leq 35$ °C)	Patients admitted to a trauma center
			Operative management of patients with an abdominal gunshot wound	Patients with a penetrating abdominal injury by firearm
			Tetanus prophylaxis	All patients with exposed soft tissues
			Antibiotics for open fractures	Number of patients with an open fracture receiving an antimicrobial agent within 1 h of hospital arrival
			Time to cranial CT for patients with GCS < 14	GCS < 14
			Patient with GCS < 13 has a head CT within 4 h of arrival in ED	Adult TBI: GCS < 13; pediatric TBI: GCS < 12
			Time to CT scan from ED admission	ED patients with blunt force injuries AND trauma team activation (TTA) OR ED documented GCS < 9, receiving CT scan within 1 h of ED arrival
			E-FAST in patient without CT	Patients without CT
			Blood analysis performed/BE documented	All patients
			Coagulation test (TEG/ROTEM)	All patients with active bleeding
			ED stay > 1 h for patients with GCS < 9 or intubated (level I/II)	TBI patients with GCS $\geq 4$ or $\leq 10$ in a level I/II trauma center
			ED stay > 1 h for patients admitted to ICU or OR	TBI patients with GCS $\geq 4$ or $\leq 8$ or intubated in a level I/II trauma center
			Massive transfusion protocol activation	Patients with active bleeding and signs of shock
			Time to start of blood transfusion	Patients with at least one unit transfused
			Orthopedic response time > 30 min in emergent case	Patients with orthopedic trauma
			Unplanned ICU admission	Patients primarily admitted to ward then moved to ICU
Surgical management		Definitive bleeding control (in patients with PTM)	All patients age 18 years and older with an injury diagnosis AND prescribed a massive transfusion who receive attempted definitive bleeding control (laparotomy, thoracotomy, percutaneous therapy) within 30 min of the massive transfusion prescription	
	Trauma	Time to first emergency surgery	Operated patients	
Delay to OR-EX-LAP (> 2 h): trauma		Operated patients		
Time to laparotomy < 1 h for patients with a proven intra-abdominal bleeding causing hypotension		SBP < 90 or requires > 4 units of packed red blood cells in the first hour for hemorrhage due to injury		

**Table 2** Process indicators (TTA Trauma Team Activation, GCS Glasgow Coma Scale, TBI traumatic brain injury, ED emergency department, AIS Abbreviated Injury Scale, ISS Injury Severity Score, CT computed tomography, TEG tromboelastography, ROTEM rotational thromboelastometry, ICU intensive care unit, EX-LAP explorative laparotomy, SBP systolic blood pressure, OR operating room, E-FAST extended focused assessment with sonography in trauma, REBOA resuscitative endovascular balloon occlusion of the aorta, CNS central nervous system) (Continued)

Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Patients
		Time to surgery in patients with shock	SBP < 90
		Patients with bleeding pelvic fracture who die within 60 min from ED arrival without preperitoneal pelvic packing or REBOA placement	Patients with bleeding pelvic fracture
	<b>Neurosurgical</b>	Time to surgical brain decompression	TBI with indication for decompression
		Patients with epidural or subdural hematoma receiving craniotomy > 4 h after arrival	Patients with epidural or subdural hematoma
		Enteral or parenteral feeding for severe head injury patients < 7 days post-injury	TBI patients with GCS ≤ 10
		Failure monitoring of intracranial pressure in severe TBI with pathological CT finding	Severe TBI
	<b>Orthopedic</b>	Open fracture grade 3 to OR > 8 h	Open fracture grade 3
		Open long bone fracture surgery < 6 h	Open fracture of the tibia, fibula, humerus, radius, or ulna
		Patient with pelvic fracture and hemodynamic instability on ED arrival with provisional stabilization of pelvic ring fracture within 12 h from arrival at the trauma center	Patients with SBP < 90 or requiring > 4 units of packed red blood cells in the first hour
		Open fracture grade 1 or 2 to OR > 16 h	Open fracture grade 1 or 2
		Open fractures—stabilized > 24 h	Long bones open fractures
	<b>Vascular</b>	Ischemic limb revascularized < 6 h	Ischemic limb following vascular trauma
		Time to restore perfusion	Ischemic limb following vascular trauma
		Deep vein thrombosis prophylaxis (within 24 h) in immobile patients	Patients immobilized ≥ 24 h (without CNS bleeds or spine/CNS surgery within 24 h)
		Patients who experienced limb amputation without previous vascular shunt placement	Patients with limb amputation

Results of the survey were analyzed and discussed during an international event in Pisa, Italy, on September 27, 2019. Then, results of discussion were diffused for a further international round of evaluation and discussion between international panels of recognized experts in the field. Through subsequent rounds of evaluation, in a modified Delphi process, the manuscript reached the definitive version together with the definitive TQI core list.

## Results

After systematic reviews of the existing literature about TQI and the trauma center/society protocol and TQI lists, a total of 1288 indicators were obtained. After analysis and elimination of duplicate QI or integration of the similar ones into a single comprehensive indicator, 89 were proposed for international evaluation. After international round, 82 were considered to be included into the definitive list (Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Average agreement was of 97% within the different experts about the different QI.

Participating centers and surgeon distribution across the different hospitals in the World Health Organization (WHO) regions are presented in Figs. 1 and 2. Answers

were analyzed, and the distributions of the importance given to the different indicators have been reported in Figs. 3 and 4 showing some variation within the different the WHO regions.

The different regions showed homogeneous differences in perceiving the importance of the different items for the different answers (Fig. 3) and for the centroid of the average of the various answers (Fig. 4).

Categories into which TQI have been divided are as follows:

- Prevention
- Structure
- Process
- Outcome
- Post-traumatic management
- Society integrational effects

## Discussion

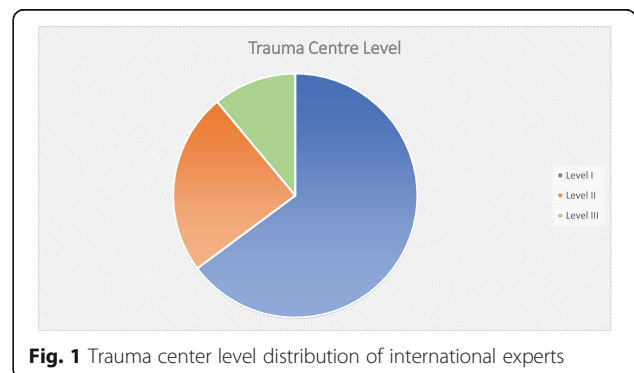
According to the WHO definitions, quality comprises three elements: structure, process, and outcome [1].

**Table 3** Outcome, post-traumatic management, and society integrational effect indicators (VAE ventilator-associated events, TBI traumatic brain injury, ED emergency department, ICU intensive care unit, OR operating room)

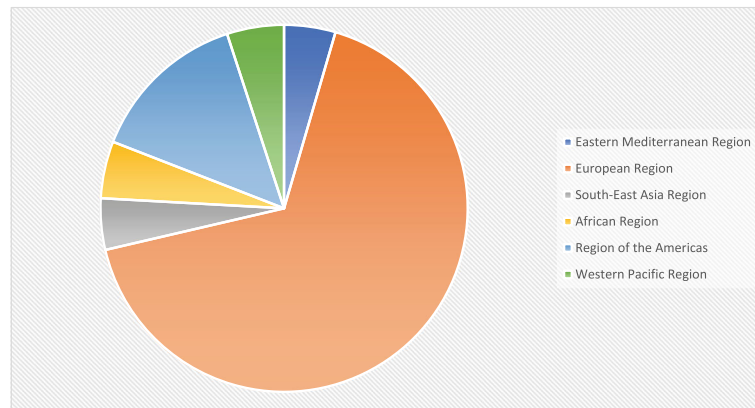
Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Patients
Outcome	Admission data	ICU length of stay	Patients admitted to ICU
		Length of stay	All patients
		Ventilator-associated events (VAE)	All patients
	Adverse events (according to Clavien-Dindo classification)	Complications during hospital stay	All patients
		Pulmonary embolus	All patients
	Mortality	Mortality rate	Admitted patients
		Death < 48 h after arrival	All patients
		Deaths >1 h after arrival occur on ward (not in ED)	Vital signs on arrival
		Death > 48 h after arrival	All patients
		Mortality in severe TBI	Severe TBI
		Penetrating injury mortality	Patients with penetrating injury
		Blunt multisystem injury mortality	Patients with multisystem injury
		Blunt single-system mortality	Patients with single-system injury
		TBI deaths > 3 h following arrival in level III/IV center	TBI with GCS >12 and max head AIS > max AIS in other anatomic regions
		Failure to rescue (severe)	Patients died with unsolved severe complication
	Functional outcome	Evaluation of patient functional status (at hospital)	All patients
	Outcomes review	Peer review of trauma deaths to evaluate quality of care and determine whether the death was potentially preventable	Dead patients
	Early post-op events	Tertiary survey	All patients
		Unexpected return to OR	All operated patients with no ongoing damage control surgery
	Post-traumatic management		Long-term physical disability facilities/support
Psychological disability facilities/support			All patients
Behavioral change and secondary health loss quantification			All patients
Tangible costs quantification			All patients
Intangible costs quantification			All patients
Society integrational effects		Observer consequences evaluation/support	All patients
		Carer consequences evaluation/support	All patients
		Dependent consequence evaluation/support	All patients

**Table 4** Secondary analysis of primary indicators

1. Error in management
2. Error in judgment, deviation for internal protocols
3. Error in diagnosis
4. Error in technique
5. Provider errors:
  - Treatment below the standard of care
  - Missed injuries
  - Error in prioritizing order of work up
  - Missing trauma scores: RTS, ISS, NISS, TRISS, etc.
6. Morbidity and mortality rates in frail patients (i.e., elderly or transplanted)



**Fig. 1** Trauma center level distribution of international experts



**Fig. 2** Expert distribution according to the World Health Organization (WHO) regions

Structure refers to stable, material characteristics (infrastructure, tools, technology) and the resources of the organizations that provide care and the financing of care (levels of funding, staffing, training, skills, payment schemes, incentives) [1].

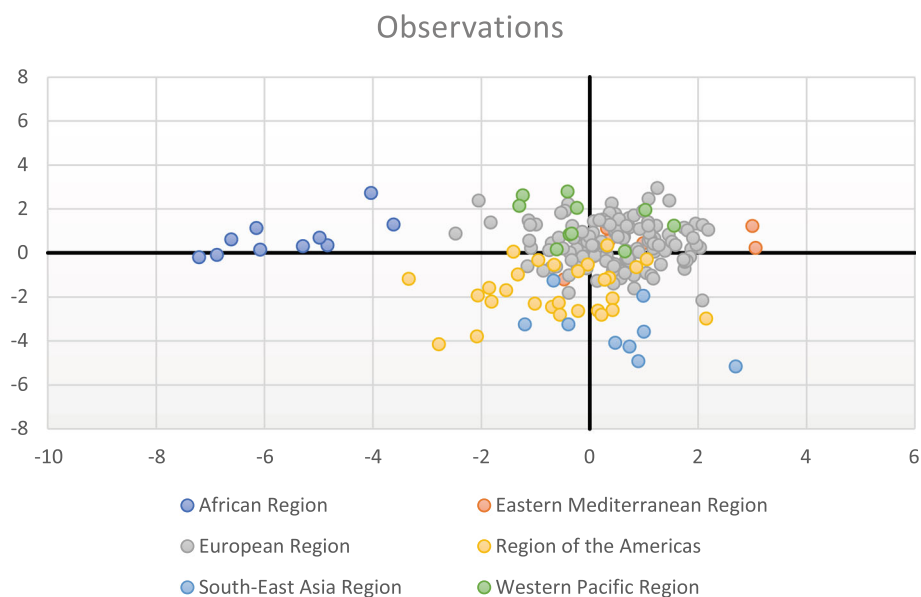
Process is the interaction between caregivers and patients during which structural inputs from the health care system are transformed into health outcomes. The process is the actual provision of medical care to the patient [1].

Outcomes can be measured in terms of health status, deaths, or disability-adjusted life years—a measure that encompasses the morbidity and mortality of patients or groups of patients. Outcomes also include patient satisfaction or patient response to the health care system [1].

At present, however, trauma system evolution must take into consideration the necessity to relate the system

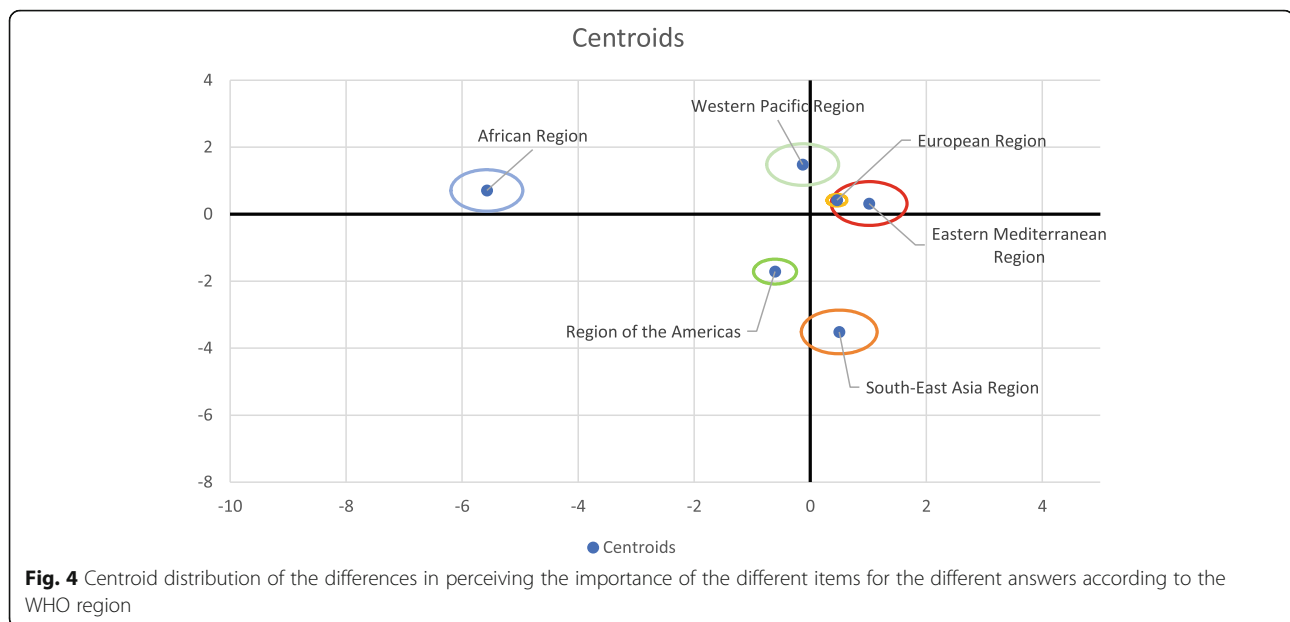
to the context into which it operates. For this reason, quality evaluation must comprise some more aspects influenced by and influencing the trauma patient’s management.

Present manuscript aims to answer to the recognized necessity of an international agreement about a QI core set. Quality improvement is mainly a behavioral change, and it is impossible to change if no shared and agreed points exist. Shared and largely approved and agreed-on QI are needed to improve quality not in a competitive view but in a reciprocal improvement behavior. It is not possible to proceed with a transparent, explicit, systematic, data-driven performance measurement if there is no agreement upon indicators and measures. A very high number of existing proposed TQI have been searched, reported, and resumed. For sure, search may not have been exhaustive, despite the evaluation of



**Fig. 3** Differences in perceiving the importance of the different items for the different answers according to the WHO region





multiple databases using comprehensive research strategies and imposing no language restrictions. As a counterpart, the very high number of redundant indicators clearly shows how it approximated the completeness. We can assume that very few eventual other QI may have been not considered.

Present paper demonstrated that a common set of clearly defined, evidence-based, broadly accepted trauma QIs does not exist. A large group of heterogeneous indicators are diffusely and non-homogeneously utilized. Moreover, the vision and perception of TQI across the world is widely different as clearly shown in Figs. 3 and 4. This different perception is the reflection of different cultural and organizational models, and at the same time, it results in slightly different priorities. However, present international effort aims also to balance the differences in a shared TQI in order to promote intersystem comparison and improvement.

One of the main factors emerging from the analysis is the imbalance existing between QIs evaluating prehospital, in-hospital, and posthospital management. In fact, current literature universally focused on in-hospital phase of trauma care. Very few QIs are dedicated to the analysis of the pre- and posthospital phases. This reflects the lack in organizational systems, indifferently from the WHO region and from the resources of the system. This may be due to a disconnect between the professional figures reflecting on the three phases of trauma management. The in-hospital phase is diffusely considered the most important. For this reason, organizational efforts are maximized in this part with very few resources dedicated to the others. However, it should be stressed as the pre- and posthospital phases may strongly impair

the effectiveness of the in-hospital trauma management. Lastly, prevention phase is not considered nor evaluated at all.

Donabedian stratification of healthcare QIs into structure, process, and outcome evaluation is valid and diffusely accepted [6–8]. However, as trauma involves more than the hospital and may impact on multiple different levels of the sanitary and economical systems, its quality management evaluation should encompass more than the already defined three key-points. It must consider the system in which the “structure” is included in, and international trauma registries must consider obtaining data even regarding socio-economical setting together with the performance of the specific hospital/system.

This paper proposes a six level stratification of TQI: prevention, structure, process, outcome, post-traumatic management, and society integrational effects.

Quality measures other than mere hospital morbidity and mortality and management process are strongly needed to evaluate the real outcome dimensions referring to trauma prevention, health-related quality-of-life, psychosocial impact of the injury, etc. with the aim of providing a more refined specificity for all the different components of patient care.

All these phases reflect even direct and indirect costs that may be even very important in a national and international view. For these reasons, they should also be included into trauma system quality evaluation. Cost evaluation however should be done at a local or national level. International cost comparison may be impossible or at least useless due to vastly different organizational/legal/economical models.

Lastly, a need to improve the science behind the development, validation, and use of indicators is urgent.

## Conclusion

Present trauma quality indicator core set represents the result of an international effort aiming to provide a useful tool in quality evaluation and improvement. Further improvement may only be possible through international trauma registry development. This will allow for huge international data accrual permitting to evaluate results and compare outcomes.

## Abbreviations

QI: Quality indicators; TQI: Trauma quality indicators; WHO: World Health Organization; TTA: Trauma Team Activation; GCS: Glasgow Coma Scale; TBI: Traumatic brain injury; ED: Emergency department; AIS: Abbreviated Injury Scale; ISS: Injury Severity Score; CT: Computed tomography; TEG: Tromboelastography; ROTEM: Rotational thromboelastometry; ICU: Intensive care unit; EX-LAP: Explorative laparotomy; SBP: Systolic blood pressure; OR: Operating room; E-FAST: Extended focused assessment with sonography in trauma; REBOA: Resuscitative endovascular balloon occlusion of the aorta; CNS: Central nervous system; VAE: Ventilator-associated events

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None

### WSES Trauma Quality Indicators Expert Panel

Zygmantas Kuliesius<sup>1</sup>, Luigi Conti<sup>2</sup>, Agron Dogjani<sup>3</sup>, Jae Gil Lee<sup>4</sup>, Heitor Consani<sup>5</sup>, Domenico Russello<sup>6</sup>, Marina Bortul<sup>7</sup>, Teresa Gimenez Maurel<sup>8</sup>, Hossein Samadi Kaf<sup>9</sup>, Harissou Adamou<sup>10</sup>, Vasilescu Alin<sup>11</sup>, Umberto Robustelli<sup>12</sup>, Norio Sato<sup>13</sup>, Charalampos Seretis<sup>14</sup>, Martha Quiodettis<sup>15</sup>, Carlos Augusto Gomes<sup>16</sup>, Victor Kong<sup>17</sup>, Andee Dzulkaernaen Zakaria<sup>18</sup>, Ali Guner<sup>19</sup>, Mahir Gachabayov<sup>20</sup>, Sharfuddin Chowdhury<sup>21</sup>, Francesco Pata<sup>22</sup>, Alberto Garcia<sup>23</sup>, Miran Rems<sup>24</sup>, Koray Das<sup>25</sup>, J.G. Riedel<sup>26</sup>, Konstantinos Lasithiotakis<sup>27</sup>, Ruslan Sydorhuk<sup>28</sup>, Larisa Sydorhuk<sup>29</sup>, Eftychios Losteridis<sup>30</sup>, Alexander Buia<sup>31</sup>, Michael McFarlane<sup>32</sup>, Renzo Ciani<sup>33</sup>, Virginia María Durán Muñoz-Cruzado<sup>34</sup>, Dario Tartaglia<sup>35</sup>, Orestis Ioannidis<sup>36</sup>, Måns Muhrbeck<sup>37</sup>, Martin Reicher<sup>38</sup>, Francesco Roscio<sup>39</sup>, Marco Ceresoli<sup>39</sup>, Dimitrios Tsiftsis<sup>40</sup>, Alfie Kavalakat<sup>41</sup>, Tadeja Pintar<sup>42</sup>, George Georgioudis<sup>43</sup>, Gabriele Ricci<sup>44</sup>, Rajashekar Mohan<sup>45</sup>, Sten Saar<sup>46</sup>, Isidoro Di Carlo<sup>47</sup>, Arda Isik<sup>47</sup>, Ali Yasen Yasen Mohamed Ahmed<sup>48</sup>, Ricardo Alessandro Teixeira Gonsaga<sup>49</sup>, Fabrizio Sammartano<sup>50</sup>, Luis Tallon-Aguilar<sup>34</sup>, Tomohisa Shoko<sup>51</sup>, Jeremy Hsu<sup>52</sup>, Yoshiro Kobe<sup>53</sup>, Christian Galatioto<sup>35</sup>, Luigi Romeo<sup>54</sup>, Mauro Podda<sup>55</sup>, Andrea Mingoli<sup>56</sup>, Rafael Castro Delgado<sup>57</sup>, Gerald Ekwen<sup>58</sup>, Vanlander Aude<sup>59</sup>, Carles Olona<sup>60</sup>, Paolo Boati<sup>61</sup>, Stefano Magnone<sup>62</sup>, Massimo Capaldi<sup>44</sup>, Miklos Bala<sup>63</sup>, Edoardo Picetti<sup>64</sup>, Ionut Negoai<sup>65</sup>, Kenneth Y. Y. Kok<sup>66</sup>, Asri Che Jusoh<sup>67</sup>, Bruno Amato<sup>68</sup>, Gabriela Elisa Nita<sup>69</sup>, Andrew de Beau<sup>70</sup>, Zaza Demetrasvili<sup>71</sup>, R. Justin Davies<sup>72</sup>, Jae Il Kim<sup>73</sup>, André Pereira<sup>74</sup>, Luca Fattori<sup>39</sup>, Ciro Paolillo<sup>75</sup>, Wagih Ghannam<sup>76</sup>, Fernando Machado Rodriguez<sup>77</sup>, Luca Berardi<sup>78</sup>, Maria Giofrè Florio<sup>79</sup>, Matthias Hecker<sup>80</sup>, Vincent Dubuisson<sup>81</sup>, Donal B. O'Connor<sup>82</sup>, Nicola De'Angelis<sup>83</sup>, Ivan Dobric<sup>84</sup>, Damien Massalou<sup>85</sup>, Per Örtengren<sup>86</sup>, Emmanouil Pikoulis<sup>87</sup>, Bakarne Ugarte-Sierra<sup>88</sup>, W.P. Zuidema<sup>89</sup>, Aristotelis Kechagias<sup>90</sup>, Sanjay Marwah<sup>91</sup>, Andrey Litvin<sup>92</sup>, Ioannis Nikolopoulos<sup>93</sup>, Antonio Pesce<sup>94</sup>, Selman Uranues<sup>95</sup>, Davide Luppi<sup>96</sup>, Sascha Flohe<sup>97</sup>, Aleix Martínez-Pérez<sup>98</sup>, Manuel Lorenzo<sup>99</sup>, Luigi Branca Vergano<sup>100</sup>, Mario Manca<sup>101</sup>, Paolo Malacarne<sup>102</sup>, Hayato Kurihara<sup>103</sup>, Sandy Widder<sup>104</sup>, Marsia Pucciarelli<sup>35</sup>, Fabio Monzani<sup>105</sup>, Pietro Brambillasca<sup>106</sup>, Davide Corbella<sup>106</sup>, Ferdinando Agresta<sup>107</sup>, Lynne Moore<sup>108</sup>, Luis Antonio Buonomo<sup>109</sup>, Amos O. Adeleye<sup>110</sup>, Dennis Kim<sup>111</sup>, Massimiliano Veroux<sup>94</sup>, Timothy Craig Hardcastle<sup>112</sup>, Salomone Di Saverio<sup>72</sup>, Alfonso Recordare<sup>113</sup>, Ines Rubio-Perez<sup>114</sup>, Sergey Shlyapnikov<sup>115</sup>, Razim Rahim<sup>116</sup>, Gustavo Miguel Machain Vega<sup>117</sup>, Kessel Boris<sup>118</sup>, Robert Sawyer<sup>119</sup>, Oussama Baraket<sup>120</sup>, Kjetil Soreide<sup>121</sup>, Clemens Weber<sup>122</sup>, Chen-June Seak<sup>123</sup>, Simon Herman<sup>124</sup>, Emiliano Gamberini<sup>125</sup>, Silvia Costa<sup>126</sup>, Gualtiero Mazzocconi<sup>127</sup>, Edgard Lozada<sup>128</sup>, Dimitrios Manatakis<sup>129</sup>, Varut Lohsirawat<sup>130</sup>, Adamu Ahmed<sup>131</sup>, Bahaa Elbery<sup>132</sup>, Guido Alberto Massimo Tiberio<sup>133</sup>, Massimo Santini<sup>134</sup>, Luca Mellace<sup>135</sup>, Cathrine Harstad Enoksen<sup>136</sup>, Piotr Major<sup>137</sup>, Dario Parini<sup>138</sup>, Mario Improta<sup>139</sup>, Paola Fugazzola<sup>139</sup>, Silvia Pini<sup>102</sup>, Gaetano Liberti<sup>140</sup>, Costanza Martino<sup>125</sup>, Lorenzo Cobianchi<sup>141</sup>, Gabriele Canzi<sup>142</sup>, Enrico Cicuttin<sup>141</sup>, Jakub Kenig<sup>143</sup>, Mauro Zago<sup>144</sup>, Sandro

Giannessi<sup>145</sup>, Michelangelo Scaglione<sup>146</sup>, Eugenio Orsitto<sup>147</sup>, Roberto Cioni<sup>148</sup>, Lorenzo Ghiadoni<sup>105</sup>, Francesco Menichetti<sup>149</sup>, Vanni Agnoletti<sup>125</sup>, Gabriele Sganga<sup>150</sup>, Paolo Prosperi<sup>151</sup>, Franco Roviello<sup>152</sup>, Paolo De Paolis<sup>153</sup>, Giovanni Gordini<sup>154</sup>, Francesco Forfori<sup>155</sup>, Paolo Ruscelli<sup>156</sup>, Francesco Gabrielli<sup>39</sup>, Adolfo Puglisi<sup>35</sup>, Andrea Bertolucci<sup>35</sup>, Santino Marchi<sup>157</sup>, Massimo Bellini<sup>157</sup>, Sergio Casagli<sup>158</sup>, Belinda De Simone<sup>159</sup>, Fabio Carmassi<sup>146</sup>, Stefano Marchetti<sup>146</sup>, Marco Accorsini<sup>146</sup>, Camilla Cremonini<sup>35</sup>, Federica Morelli<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Republican Vilnius University Hospital, Vilnius, Lithuania

<sup>2</sup> Department of Surgery, G. Da Saliceto Hospital, Piacenza, Italy

<sup>3</sup> Department of General Surgery and Trauma, University Hospital of Trauma, Tirana, Albania

<sup>4</sup> Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul, Korea

<sup>5</sup> Emergency section, Santa Casa, Piracicaba, Brazil

<sup>6</sup> Department of Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies "G.F. Ingrassia", Cannizzaro Hospital, University of Catania, Catania, Italy

<sup>7</sup> Surgical Department, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy

<sup>8</sup> General and Digestive Surgery, Miguel Servet University Hospital, Zaragoza, Spain

<sup>9</sup> Faculty of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

<sup>10</sup> Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Zinder, Zinder National Hospital, Zinder, Niger

<sup>11</sup> First Surgical Clinic, St. Spiridon Hospital, Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, Romania

<sup>12</sup> AORN Antonio Cardarelli, Napoli, Italy

<sup>13</sup> Dept. of Emergency and Critical Care Medicine, Ehime University Hospital, Toon, Japan

<sup>14</sup> George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust, Warwickshire, UK

<sup>15</sup> General Surgery dept., Hospital Santo Tomas, Panama City, Panama

<sup>16</sup> Hospital Universitário Terezinha de Jesus, Faculdade de Ciências Médicas e da Saúde de Juiz de Fora - Suprema, Juiz de Fora, Brazil

<sup>17</sup> Department of Surgery, University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa

<sup>18</sup> Department of Surgery, School of Medical Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Kelantan, Malaysia

<sup>19</sup> Karadeniz Technical University, Dept. of General Surgery, Trabzon, Turkey

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir City Emergency Hospital, Vladimir, Russia

<sup>21</sup> Trauma Center, King Saud Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

<sup>22</sup> Department of Surgery, Nicola Giannettasio Hospital, Corigliano-Rossano, Italy

<sup>23</sup> Division of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, Fundación Valle del Lili, Cali, Colombia

<sup>24</sup> Department of Abdominal and General Surgery, General Hospital Jesenice, Jesenice, Slovenia

<sup>25</sup> Adana City Education and Research Hospital, Adana, Turkey

<sup>26</sup> Dept. of General and Thoracic Surgery, University Hospital of Giessen, Giessen, Germany

<sup>27</sup> Department of General Surgery, University Hospital of Heraklion, Crete, Greece

<sup>28</sup> General Surgery Department, Bukovinian State Medical University, Chernivtsi, Ukraine

<sup>29</sup> Family Medicine and Primary Care Department, Bukovinian State Medical University, Chernivtsi, Ukraine

<sup>30</sup> 1st Department of Surgery, Kavala General Hospital, Kavala, Greece

<sup>31</sup> Department of General, Visceral and Thoracic Surgery, Asklepios Klinik Langen, Langen, Germany

<sup>32</sup> Department of Surgery, Radiology, Anaesthetics and Intensive Care, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

<sup>33</sup> Aurelia Hospital, Roma, Italy

<sup>34</sup> General and Digestive Surgery Department, Virgen del Rocío University Hospital, Seville, Spain

<sup>35</sup> General Emergency and Trauma Surgery Department, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy,

<sup>36</sup> 4th Surgical Department, Medical School, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, General Hospital "G. Papanikolaou", Thessaloniki, Greece

<sup>37</sup> Department of Surgery, and Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, Linköping University, Norrköping, Sweden

<sup>38</sup> Division of General Surgery, ASST Valle Olona, Busto Arsizio, Italy

<sup>39</sup> General Surgery Department, Milano-Bicocca University Hospital, Monza, Italy

<sup>40</sup> Emergency Department, Nikaia General Hospital, Piraeus, Greece

<sup>41</sup> Department of surgery, Jubilee Mission Medical College, Thrissur, India

<sup>42</sup> Department of Surgery, UMC Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

<sup>43</sup> Surgical Department, Xanthi General Hospital, Xanthi, Greece

<sup>44</sup> General and Emergency Surgery, San Camillo-Forlanini Hospital, Roma, Italy



- <sup>45</sup> Department of Surgery, K.S. Hegde Medical Academy, Mangalore, India
- <sup>46</sup> North Estonia Medical Centre, Tallinn, Estonia
- <sup>47</sup> General Surgery Department, Erzincan University, Erzincan, Turkey
- <sup>48</sup> General Surgery, Khartoum Teaching Hospital, Sudan
- <sup>49</sup> Surgery Trauma, Hospital Padre Albino, Catanduva, Brazil
- <sup>50</sup> Trauma Team and General Surgery, ASST Niguarda, Milano, Italy
- <sup>51</sup> Emergency and Critical Care Medicine, Tokyo Women's Medical University Medical Center East, Tokyo, Japan
- <sup>52</sup> Trauma, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, Australia
- <sup>53</sup> Dept. of Surgery, Chiba Emergency Medical Center, Chiba, Japan
- <sup>54</sup> Emergency Surgery Unit, Arcispedale Sant'Anna, Ferrara, Italy
- <sup>55</sup> Department of Emergency Surgery, Cagliari University Hospital, Cagliari, Italy
- <sup>56</sup> Surgery Dept., Policlinico Umberto I, Roma, Italy
- <sup>57</sup> SAMU-Asturias, Oviedo University, Oviedo, Spain
- <sup>58</sup> Surgery, JJ Dossen Memorial Hospital, Harper, Liberia
- <sup>59</sup> University Hospital Ghent, Ghent, Belgium
- <sup>60</sup> General and Digestive Surgery Dept., Joan XXIII University Hospital, Tarragona, Spain
- <sup>61</sup> ASST Santi Paolo e Carlo, Milano, Italy
- <sup>62</sup> General Surgery Unit, Papa Giovanni XXIII Hospital, Bergamo, Italy
- <sup>63</sup> Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center, Jerusalem, Israel
- <sup>64</sup> Anesthesia and Intensive Care Dept., Parma University Hospital, Parma, Italy
- <sup>65</sup> General Surgery, Emergency Hospital of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
- <sup>66</sup> PAPRSB Institute of Health Sciences, University Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei
- <sup>67</sup> General Surgery, Kuala Krai Hospital, Kuala Krai, Malaysia
- <sup>68</sup> Dpt. of Clinical Medicine and Surgery, AU Policlinico Federico II, Napoli, Italy
- <sup>69</sup> General Surgery, Sant'Anna Hospital, Castelnovo ne' Monti, Italy
- <sup>70</sup> Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
- <sup>71</sup> Department of Surgery, Tbilisi State Medical University, Kipshidze Central University Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia
- <sup>72</sup> Cambridge Colorectal Unit, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Cambridge, UK
- <sup>73</sup> Dept. of Surgery, Inje University Ilsan Paik Hospital, Goyang, South Korea
- <sup>74</sup> Department of Surgery, Centro Hospitalar e Universitário do São João, Porto, Portugal
- <sup>75</sup> Emergency Department, ASST Spedali Civili di Brescia, Brescia, Italy
- <sup>76</sup> General Surgery Department, Mansoura University Hospital, Mansoura, Egypt
- <sup>77</sup> Departamento de Emergencia, Hospital de Clínicas, Montevideo, Uruguay
- <sup>78</sup> Trauma Center ed Emergenza Chirurgica, San Martino Polyclinic Hospital, Genova, Italy
- <sup>79</sup> DEA Emergenze, AOU Policlinico G. Martino, Messina, Italy
- <sup>80</sup> Department of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, University Hospital Giessen, Giessen, Germany
- <sup>81</sup> Bordeaux University Hospital, Bordeaux, France
- <sup>82</sup> Tallaght University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland
- <sup>83</sup> Department of Digestive, Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery and Liver Transplantation, Henri Mondor University Hospital, Paris, France
- <sup>84</sup> Clinical Hospital Centre Zagreb, Surgical Clinic, Zagreb, Croatia
- <sup>85</sup> Acute Care Surgery, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Nice, Nice, France
- <sup>86</sup> Dept. of Surgery, Sahlgrenska University Hospital, Gothenburg, Sweden
- <sup>87</sup> 3rd Department of Surgery, Attiko Hospital, Athens, Greece
- <sup>88</sup> Department of General Surgery, Galdakao-Usansolo Hospital, Bizkaia, Spain
- <sup>89</sup> Trauma surgery, Amsterdam UMC, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- <sup>90</sup> Department of Surgery, Kanta-Häme Central Hospital, Hämeenlinna, Finland
- <sup>91</sup> Department of Surgery, Pt. B.D., PGIMS, Rohtak, India
- <sup>92</sup> Department of Surgical Disciplines, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Regional Clinical Hospital, Kaliningrad, Russia
- <sup>93</sup> Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, London, UK
- <sup>94</sup> Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences and Advanced Technologies "G.F. Ingrassia", University Hospital of Catania, Catania, Italy
- <sup>95</sup> Department of Surgery, Medical University of Graz, Graz, Austria
- <sup>96</sup> General and Emergency Surgery, IRCCS Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy
- <sup>97</sup> Städt. Klinikum Solingen, Solingen, Germany
- <sup>98</sup> Department of General and Digestive Surgery, Hospital Universitario Doctor Peset, Valencia, Spain
- <sup>99</sup> Surgery Methodist Hospital, Dallas, Texas, USA
- <sup>100</sup> Orthopedic Department, Bufalini Hospital, Cesena, Italy
- <sup>101</sup> Versilia Hospital, Lido di Camaiore, Italy
- <sup>102</sup> Anesthesia and Intensive Care Unit PS, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy
- <sup>103</sup> Emergency Surgery and Trauma Unit, Humanitas Research Hospital, Rozzano, Italy
- <sup>104</sup> Department of Surgery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
- <sup>105</sup> Dept. Clinical and Experimental Medicine, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy
- <sup>106</sup> Department of Anesthesia, Hospital Papa Giovanni XXIII, Bergamo, Italy
- <sup>107</sup> General Surgery Dept., Civil Hospital, Adria, Italy
- <sup>108</sup> Universite Laval, Quebec, Canada
- <sup>109</sup> Hospital "Dr. Alberto Balestrini" La Matanza, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- <sup>110</sup> Department of Surgery, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, and Department of Neurological Surgery, University College Hospital, UCH, Ibadan, Nigeria
- <sup>111</sup> Department of Surgery, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, Torrance, California, USA
- <sup>112</sup> Department of Trauma ICU, IALCH, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa
- <sup>113</sup> General and Emergency Surgery Department, Angel Hospital, Venezia, Italy
- <sup>114</sup> General Surgery Department, Hospital Universitario La Paz, Madrid, Spain
- <sup>115</sup> Surgical Infections Department, Emergency Care Institute n.a. Djanlidze, Saint Petersburg, Russia
- <sup>116</sup> Department of Surgery, Port Dickson Hospital, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
- <sup>117</sup> Universidad Nacional de Asuncion, Facultad de Ciencias Medicas, Hospital de Clínicas, San Lorenzo, Paraguay
- <sup>118</sup> Surgical Division, Hillel Yaffe Medical Center, Hadera, Israel
- <sup>119</sup> Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA
- <sup>120</sup> General Surgery, Hospital Habib Bouguéfa de Bizerte, Bizerte, Tunisia
- <sup>121</sup> Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, Stavanger University Hospital, Stavanger, Norway
- <sup>122</sup> Department of Neurosurgery, Stavanger University Hospital, Stavanger, Norway
- <sup>123</sup> Department of Emergency Medicine, Lin-Kou Medical Center, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Taoyuan, Taiwan; College of Medicine, Chang Gung University, Taoyuan, Taiwan
- <sup>124</sup> Department of Traumatology, UMC Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- <sup>125</sup> Anesthesia and Intensive Care Unit, Bufalini Hospital, Cesena, Italy
- <sup>126</sup> Surgery, CHVNG/E, EPE, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal
- <sup>127</sup> Surgery, Sandro Pertini Hospital, Roma, Italy
- <sup>128</sup> Department of Surgery, Hospital Regional de Alta Especialidad del Bajío, León, México
- <sup>129</sup> Department of Surgery, Athens Naval and Veterans Hospital, Athens, Greece;
- <sup>130</sup> Faculty of Medicine, Department of Surgery, Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand
- <sup>131</sup> Surgery, Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital Zaria, Zaria, Nigeria
- <sup>132</sup> General Surgery, Al-Hussein University Hospital, Cairo, Egypt
- <sup>133</sup> Surgical Clinic, Department of Clinical and Experimental Sciences, University of Brescia, ASST Spedali Civili di Brescia, Brescia, Italy
- <sup>134</sup> Emergency Medicine Department, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy
- <sup>135</sup> San Carlo Borromeo Hospital, Milano, Italy
- <sup>136</sup> Orthopaedic Department, Stavanger University Hospital, Stavanger, Norway
- <sup>137</sup> 2nd Department of General Surgery, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Krakow, Poland
- <sup>138</sup> General Surgery, Santa Maria della Misericordia Hospital, Rovigo, Italy
- <sup>139</sup> General, Emergency and Trauma Surgery Department, Bufalini Hospital, Cesena, Italy
- <sup>140</sup> Neurosurgery, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy
- <sup>141</sup> University of Pavia, Department of General Surgery, IRCCS San Matteo, Pavia, Italy
- <sup>142</sup> Maxillofacial Surgery Unit, Emergency Department, ASST Niguarda, Milano, Italy
- <sup>143</sup> Department of General, Oncologic and Geriatric Surgery, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Kraków, Poland
- <sup>144</sup> Department of General Surgery, General Surgery Unit, Lecco Hospital, Lecco, Italy
- <sup>145</sup> General Surgery, San Jacopo Hospital, Pistoia, Italy

<sup>146</sup> Orthopaedic Department, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>147</sup> Radiology Unit, Emergency Department, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>148</sup> Division of Interventional Radiology, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>149</sup> Infectious Diseases Clinic, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>150</sup> Department of Emergency Surgery, "A. Gemelli Hospital", Catholic University of Rome, Roma, Italy  
<sup>151</sup> Emergency Surgery Unit, Careggi University Hospital, Firenze, Italy  
<sup>152</sup> Unit of Surgical Oncology, Department of Medicine, Surgery and Neurosciences, University of Siena, Siena, Italy  
<sup>153</sup> General Surgery Dept., Gradenigo Hospital, Torino, Italy  
<sup>154</sup> Anesthesia and Critical Care, Ospedale Maggiore, Bologna, Italy  
<sup>155</sup> ICU Dept., Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>156</sup> Emergency Surgery Unit, Torrette Hospital, Polytechnic University of Marche, Torrette, Italy  
<sup>157</sup> Gastrointestinal Unit, Department of Translational Sciences and New Technologies in Medicine and Surgery, Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>158</sup> Neuro ICU dept. Pisa University Hospital, Pisa, Italy  
<sup>159</sup> Département de Chirurgie Viscérale, Centre Hospitalier Poissy/Saint Germain en Laye, Poissy, France

#### Authors' contributions

FC, YK, EM, RM, RC, CO, RI, AWK, WB, MS, AH, LA, AL, VR, IC, FV, MC, ACM, BS, AP, OC, FAZ, MM, MMi, MC, VK, MS, GPF, YO, GLB, and FCa contributed to the manuscript conception and draft, critically revised the manuscript, and contributed important scientific knowledge giving the final approval.

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#### Author details

<sup>1</sup>General Emergency and Trauma Surgery Department, Pisa University Hospital, Via Paradisa, 2, 56124 Pisa, Italy. <sup>2</sup>Division of General Surgery, Rambam Health Care Campus, Haifa, Israel. <sup>3</sup>Ernest E Moore Shock Trauma Center, Denver Health, Denver, CO, USA. <sup>4</sup>Department of Surgery, Harborview Medical Center, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA. <sup>5</sup>Riverside University Health System, Riverside, CA, USA. <sup>6</sup>Division of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, Fundación Valle del Lili, Cali, Colombia. <sup>7</sup>VCU Medical Center, Richmond, VA, USA. <sup>8</sup>General, Acute Care, Abdominal Wall Reconstruction, and Trauma Surgery, Foothills Medical Centre, Calgary, Canada. <sup>9</sup>Department of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla, La Jolla, San Diego, CA, USA. <sup>10</sup>General and Emergency Surgery, Macerata Hospital, Macerata, Italy. <sup>11</sup>Department of General and Thoracic Surgery, University Hospital of Giessen, Giessen, Germany. <sup>12</sup>General, Emergency and Trauma Surgery Department, Bufalini Hospital, Cesena, Italy. <sup>13</sup>Abdominal Center, Helsinki University Hospital, Helsinki, Finland. <sup>14</sup>Department of War Surgery, Kirov Military Medical Academy, Saint-Petersburg, Russia. <sup>15</sup>General and Emergency Surgery Dept., Auckland City Hospital, Auckland, New Zealand. <sup>16</sup>Department of Surgery, Hospital Angeles Lomas, Mexico City, Mexico. <sup>17</sup>Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon. <sup>18</sup>Douala Gynaeco-Obstetric and Pediatric Hospital, Douala, Cameroon. <sup>19</sup>General Surgery Department, University Hospital St George, Plovdiv, Bulgaria. <sup>20</sup>Department of Surgery, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, USA. <sup>21</sup>Trauma Team and General Surgery, ASST Niguarda, Milan, Italy. <sup>22</sup>Department of Surgery, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, UAE University, Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates. <sup>23</sup>Department of Trauma and Orthopedic Surgery, Cologne-Merheim Medical Center (CMMC), University Witten/Herdecke (UW/H), Cologne, Germany. <sup>24</sup>Statistic Dept., Pisa University, Pisa, Italy. <sup>25</sup>Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France. <sup>26</sup>Department of Emergency Surgery, City

Hospital, Mozyr, Belarus. <sup>27</sup>General Surgery Dept., Letterkenny Hospital, Letterkenny, Ireland. <sup>28</sup>Division of Trauma Surgery, School of Medical Sciences, University of Campinas, Campinas, Brazil. <sup>29</sup>Trauma and Acute Critical Care Center, Tokyo Medical and Dental University Hospital, Tokyo, Japan. <sup>30</sup>General Surgery, Brescia University Hospital, Brescia, Italy. <sup>31</sup>Emergency and Trauma Surgery, Parma University Hospital, Parma, Italy.

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