

GENERAL SURGERY

WWW.SPECIALISTGENERALSURGEON.CO.ZA



January 2026: Issue 1



How Surgeons Make Decisions? a Peek into Surgical Thinking

Happy new year and welcome to the January newsletter, as a general surgeon, I am committed to empowering patients with knowledge to navigate their healthcare journeys confidently. This month, we look at how surgeons make decisions.

Many patients imagine that surgical decisions are made quickly or instinctively, but the reality is far more structured and deliberate. Every recommendation a surgeon makes is based on layers of information, careful risk assessment and experience built over years of training. This month, we look at how surgeons actually think when deciding whether surgery is needed, when it should happen and how it should be performed?

Surgical Decision making

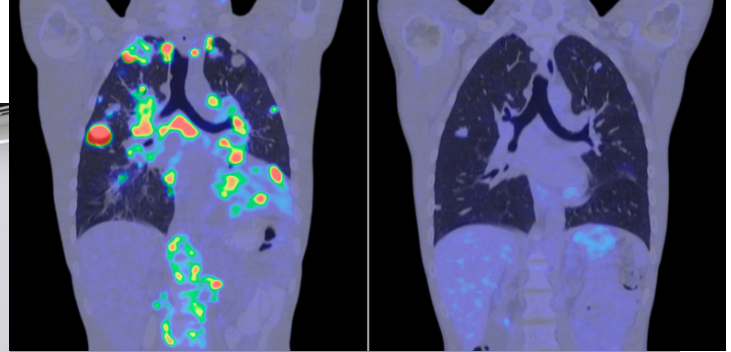
The first step in surgical decision-making is understanding the full picture. This includes listening carefully to the patient's symptoms, reviewing medical history, examining the body and analysing imaging such as ultrasounds, CT scans or MRIs. A surgeon is not just looking for a diagnosis they are evaluating how severe the condition is, how it is progressing and how it is affecting daily life.

General Surgery News

I pick a topic each month and discuss it in detail on my social media accounts.



Dr. Tendani Muthambi
Specialist General Surgeon



Communication in surgical thinking

Communication is central to surgical thinking. Surgeons must explain complex medical decisions in a way patients can understand, ensuring informed consent. A patient who understands why surgery is recommended or why it is not becomes an active partner in their care, which improves outcomes and trust.

What influences surgical recommendations

Patient-specific factors play a major role in every decision. Age, existing medical conditions, fitness level, previous surgeries and even lifestyle habits influence surgical planning. Two patients with the same diagnosis may receive different recommendations because their bodies and risk profiles are different. Surgery is never one-size-fits-all.

Preparation is key before any surgery

As surgeons we think in scenarios. We plan not only for the ideal outcome, but for potential complications. Before entering the operating theatre, a surgeon mentally maps out alternative strategies: what to do if bleeding occurs, if anatomy is unusual or if the condition is more advanced than expected. This preparation allows for calm, controlled decision-making during surgery.

Patient centered care

Another often overlooked aspect is the surgeon's responsibility to say no to surgery when it is not in the patient's best interest. Sometimes the safest decision is to monitor, treat conservatively or refer to another specialist. This requires professional integrity and a patient-first mindset, even when surgery might seem like the quicker solution.

Final thoughts



At its core, surgical decision-making is about balance: balancing urgency with safety, intervention with restraint and medical science with human understanding. When a surgeon recommends a procedure, it is the result of careful reasoning, experience and a commitment to achieving the best possible outcome for each individual patient.