Tattoos in the Operative Field: The State of the Art, Cullen et. al. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* 154(2), 2024

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Level of Evidence: 5

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This editorial describes a helpful algorithm for managing tattoos within the operative field. The author describes and cites current practices in surgical approaches to tattoos within the operative field before making recommendations based on their own expert opinion. Current proposed techniques include moving incisions when possible, using minimally invasive techniques, and hiding incisions within tattoo contours, though most of these relate to lumbar and abdominal regions.

The author's algorithm considers tattoo proximity and orientation to surgical site, followed by tattoo symmetry:

- If the tattoo cannot be avoided outright but the orientation and location are similar to the surgical approach, the tattoo may be incised along the outer tattoo margin.
- If an outer margin cannot be reached but the orientation is similar, the next best approach is to incise along an existing line within the tattoo. If the orientation of the tattoo precludes this, the next best option is based on the symmetry of the tattoo.
- For symmetrical tattoos, disruption is minimized by cutting along the plane of symmetry
- For asymmetrical tattoos, divide the tattoo into two planes

The authors note that in addition to this algorithm, closing with a monocryl suture using a running subcuticular stitch technique tends to reduce post-operative scarring and disruption. While tattoo discoloration may occur, it is correctible by tattoo artists.

The authors concluded that there are no well-established best practices for managing tattoos in the operative field at this time. This algorithm may help surgeons include patients in their shared-decision-making and reduce disruption to tattoos – ultimately improving patient confidence and satisfaction in surgical outcomes.
