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CS Solutions

Questions can be sent to editor@hpnonline.com
called in to Valerie Dimond at HPN: (941) 927-9345 ext.202 or mailed to:
HPN CS Questions, 2477 Stickney Point Road, Suite 315B, Sarasota, FL 34231
Names and hospital identification will be withheld upon request.



SPD attire, inconsistent practices, reprocessing borrowed instruments

by Ray Taurasi

Q I recently started a new job in the central processing instrument assembly area. I was surprised to find that staffs in this area were all wearing short sleeve scrub attire. Is this an acceptable practice? In my previous job we were told to wear warm up jackets over short sleeve scrubs when preparing instrument sets to prevent cross contamination.

A Sterile processing personnel preparing and packaging surgical instrument sets should wear scrub attire that fully covers the arms and is fitted at the cuffs. Wearing long sleeved attire will contain scaled skin (squames) and hair, which are shed from bare arms, and prevent them from being deposited into the instrument set or package. Organic matter, such as skin or hair, could attach to instruments and be transferred to the surgical incision site, exposing the patient to a greater risk of getting a surgical site infection or other serious post-operative complications.

Q In my many years being an operating room nurse I have seen manufacturer's representatives deliver new screws and plates in sealed plastic directly to the OR processing area. It seems like everywhere that I have worked the handling and reprocessing of these items has been treated differently. Some places considered them surgically clean and put them directly into the instrument set tray and then sterilized the set. Others opened the packages and placed what was needed into the set and ran the completed tray with the new screws and plates through the washers before repackaging and sterilizing. The new unprocessed screws and plates were placed in inventory until needed to replenish an instrument set. And still, others have washed the trays, etc., then refilled them and washed everything over again. Not working in SPD, but seeing all of these ways of doing things, I was just wondering which way would be proper rather than just an accepted practice.

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A The new screws and plates should be handled in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions for use (IFU). New screws and plates delivered unsterile in clean packages need to be processed and inspected like any other new or refurbished medical device. That would include going through the appropriate decontamination process before being sterilized — individually or in the set. The decontamination of newly acquired medical devices or instruments removes any soil related to manufacturing, repair, refurbishing, or shipping which is essential for removing any foreign matter and to ensure there will be intimate contact with the sterilant during the sterilization process. In the event that these devices arrive sterile, they should not be opened and/or reprocessed unless the manufacturer provides a specific IFU indicating that they may be reprocessed and provided with the parameters to follow. Items received sterile are most often considered single use. They may be attached to and distributed with a specific tray or set but not included inside the set without the aforementioned IFUs.

Q I am the clinical manager for the hand and foot surgical services at a large specialty hospital and, from time to time, we may borrow a sterile instrument or instrument set from a neighboring hospital. This is something we have been doing without incident for many years. Recently I had a confrontation with the nurse manager in our sterile processing department who insists that any borrowed instrument sets should be delivered to sterile processing and go through the entire reprocessing and sterilization process. I fail to see any reason why a sterile set would need to be reprocessed. I am friends with the nurse manager at the neighboring hospital and feel confident that they adhere to good technique in their department. The sterile kits are protected during transport from their facility to ours. Do you see any rationale to what our sterile processing manager is insisting?

A I must agree with your nurse manager of sterile processing. The management and healthcare professionals at your hospital are accountable and responsible for the quality of services and products delivered and used in patient care at your facility. Borrowed (loaned) instruments should be decontaminated and sterilized in the borrowing facility, according to the manufacturer's written instructions, before use. You cannot be certain as to how items are handled and/or managed by another facility. Instruments consigned or borrowed from other facilities may not have been adequately decontaminated, inspected, packaged or sterilized. Furthermore, you cannot be sure of the other facility's QA practices and ensure the efficacy of their cleaning and sterilization processes. The storage and transport conditions of borrowed sets are also unknown. The conditions for sterility maintenance during storage and transportation are challenging and require the adherence of proper environmental and materials handling protocols. Any breaches in these protocols could result in compromises in sterile integrity, resulting in contamination and/or instrument damage, which can place your patients at risk for surgical site infections and/or injuries. **HPN**

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Ray Taurasi is Eastern Regional Director of Clinical Sales and Services for [Healthmark Industries](#). His healthcare career spans over three decades as an administrator, educator, technologist, consultant and international speaker. He is a member of AORN, AHA, SGNA, AAMI,

former president of IAHCSSM and was a faculty member at numerous colleges teaching in the divisions of business administration and health sciences.

