

# HEALTHCARE PURCHASING NEWS

Inside the October Issue



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### CS Solutions

Questions can be sent to: [to:jakridge@hpnonline.com](mailto:to:jakridge@hpnonline.com) called in to Jeannie Akridge 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.



### Senior techs in Decontam; covering body hair; water hardness

by Ray Taurasi

**Q** I have been working in Sterile Processing for over ten years at the same hospital. I have attained certification as both a CRCST and CIS which has allowed me to advance to the highest level of technician in my department, a Tech III. As a Tech III, I worked exclusively in the instrument

assembly area putting together all the specialty sets. My manager retired a few months ago and the new manager now schedules me to do rotations in the decontamination area which I think is a waste of my skills. After all my hard work to get educated and advance I feel it's a real put down to make me work in Decontam. I am hoping that you might write a supporting response that my manager will see and perhaps come to his senses.

**A** I am afraid you are not going to like what I have to say but I can't support you. I see far too many hospitals that throw their new and inexperienced workers into the decontamination area with minimal training and supervision. We all know that the most critical step in reprocessing medical devices is proper cleaning and decontamination. If the decontamination process isn't done effectively the likelihood of achieving sterilization is questionable. Most of today's surgical instrumentation and medical devices are quite complex which requires specialized knowledge and education to properly care for them. Failures in the cleaning and

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decontamination of such devices not only pose the risk of cross infection, but also the risk of patient injury when instruments are damaged due to improper care and handling. In decontamination technicians are responsible for individual instruments and medical devices that cost thousands of dollars. That said, I feel your manager is totally justified in assigning senior experienced technicians to work in the decontamination area where their expertise and skills are required. I believe senior technicians should be rotated through decontamination and should always be present to work alongside the less experienced techs as a mentor and preceptor.

**Q** I have a well-trimmed mustache and am required to wear a mask to cover my facial hair when working in prep and packaging. I have a couple of coworkers who are extremely hairy. Their chest hair hangs out over their scrub tops and their bare arms are like a mohair sweater. I find it rather puzzling that I have to cover my short mustache yet these two gorillas are roaming around free shedding their fur throughout the work area. Am I over reacting?

**A** It is very important to maintain a very clean and safe environment in the sterile processing area in order to minimize the risks of cross contamination caused by contaminants such as soil, airborne organisms, dust, foreign matter and personnel. That is why we place such emphasis on various environmental controls including proper dress codes and personal hygiene. Body hair can be a source of contamination and there is the potential that shedding hair could fall into a set of instruments during processing and thus wind up inside of a patient. As a foreign object the hair could pose a serious health threat to the patient. Aside from working in a true "clean sterile work room" dressed in clean-room attire we cannot eliminate personnel contamination 100 percent. We can however do all within reason to minimize the risk of contamination from shedding body hair such as wearing a mask to cover facial hair. It would be appropriate to require hairy individuals, as you described, to wear long sleeve, high neck tops.

**Q** I have often heard the term "water hardness" used when discussing water quality but I have never really understood what it is or how it impacts the cleaning process. How would we know if our water is hard?

**A** Water Hardness is defined as the concentration of calcium and magnesium ions present in the water, expressed in terms of calcium carbonate. These minerals are found in the soil and rocks and are picked up by



Figure 1

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groundwater. Calcium, magnesium and other minerals in water bind with the cleaning agents and prevent them from attacking the soil on instruments. Thus the degree of water hardness and other dissolved solids in the water can present a barrier to thorough cleaning. The minerals found in hard water can cause spotting and filming on instruments. Mineral deposits left on instruments can cause corrosion and damage. Certain chemical agents may be more effective with hard water. Certain geographic areas are more prone to hard water conditions. In extreme conditions it might be necessary to utilize a water filtration system. It is therefore very important to know the quality of the water you are using to clean instruments. There are very simple to use, yet effective, test strips available to assess and monitor your water conditions. (See figure 1) The test strips are dipped into a sample of your water, the strip's color change is matched to a chart that will indicate the water hardness level in (ppm) parts per million; generally less than 200ppm is considered good. [HPN](#)

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 and Consultant. He is a member of AORN, AHA, SGNA, AAMI and a past president of IAHCSSM and has served on and contributed to many national committees with a myriad of professional organizations, manufacturers, corporations and prestigious healthcare networks. Taurasi has been a faculty member of numerous colleges teaching in the divisions of business *administration and health sciences*. *In addition to this column he has authored several articles and has been a featured speaker on the international scene.*

