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What if a focus on dirty data misses the point?

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### CS Solutions

Questions can be sent to: [jakridge@hpnonline.com](mailto: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.

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### Picking the suitable brush for the right instrument

by Ray Taurasi



Over the course of the past few months I have received several questions related to cleaning brushes so it seemed that it might be appropriate and useful to combine those questions into this month's column.

**Q** We have a bunch of different sizes and styles of brushes hanging on a wall brush rack in our decontamination area. I notice techs

pretty much just grab any brush that seems to be the right length for an instrument and use it. I am relatively new and inexperienced but I would think that the various sizes and styles might be for specific applications. Am I right? How can I know which brush to use?

**A** You are absolutely right. There is not one brush that is suitable for cleaning all medical devices. The style, length, diameter and bristle material are all important factors to consider. The bristle ends must be able to have direct

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contact to all surfaces and areas of the medical device that you are cleaning. Medical device manufacturers are expected to provide users with detailed cleaning instructions for use (IFUs) which must be followed to properly clean the medical device. When the IFUs indicate that a brush must be used for effective cleaning, the manufacturer should provide the appropriate brush to use, including style and size. Utilizing the wrong size brush or improper bristle material could result in unsuccessful cleaning and damage to medical device. Brush racks should be labeled and organized in a manner that allows reprocessing personnel to easily identify and select the correct brush to clean the medical device in accordance with the manufacturer's IFU.

**Q** I work for a physician-owned outpatient clinic in a rural area. His wife manages the clinic. She makes all purchasing decisions and she is quite frugal. She gets all our cleaning supplies, including our brushes, at houseware discount stores. We are required to use them until they are completely worn out. Are there any guidelines that specify how long brushes can be used or that requires they are purchased from a medical product distributor?

**A** The quality of cleaning brushes used to clean medical devices is very important. AAMI ST79:7.5.3.2 states, "Brushes and other cleaning implements should be designed for use on medical devices. They should either be single-use or disposable items or, if reusable, be decontaminated at least once daily. The device manufacturer should provide information regarding brush size for cleaning devices and lumens." The IAHCSSM Central Service Technical Manual, Seventh Edition, states, "Reusable brushes should be cleaned and disinfected or sterilized at the end of each shift or when heavily soiled." Disposable and reusable brushes should be inspected before each use. If the bristles are worn or bent the brush should be discarded.

**Q** I am responsible for reprocessing all scopes – both rigid and flexible – in our GI center. Our nurse manager has standardized on one size brush for cleaning rigid scopes and two sizes for cleaning our flexible scopes. He says as long as a brush goes through the channel without being forced or kinking that it's fine to use and there is no need to have more sizes. When I worked in the hospital, we used many more sizes for the various scopes. I am concerned that the three sizes we stock might not be adequate for all the different size scopes we have. What do you think?

**A** Utilizing the correct size brush for cleaning instrument channels is very important. If the brush diameter is too small, it will not have the necessary contact channel walls and it cannot provide the friction required to dislodge soil. Likewise, if the diameter is too big and the bristles are too long, they will lay flat when going through the channel preventing the bristle tips from touching the walls and applying the friction necessary to dislodge soil. It is also necessary that the brush is long enough to move through the entire channel and out the distal end, otherwise the soil will just become lodged in the channel at the brushes end. You need to have scope brushes that are the appropriate size for the scope's inner channel mm diameter and the appropriate length to extend through the scope's entire channel.

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**Q** Why is it necessary to have brushes made of different materials? It seems to me using metal brushes would damage the finish on instruments.

**A** Instrument cleaning brushes are available in four different materials: Nylon, brass, soft-stainless steel and stainless steel. Each is used for different applications based on the instrument's design, composition and the challenge presented by the soil. Of the four bristle materials, the nylon is the most commonly used and it is effective for cleaning most general instruments such as hemostats, scissors, needle holders and retractors. The nylon bristles are soft and safe for most of your cleaning needs. The stainless-steel bristles are stiffer and work well on removing more challenging debris for tough areas such as serrations, box locks, and instrument jaws. Stainless-steel brushes will not damage the finish on instruments as the bristles are designed to have flexibility and will bend. That said extreme force or pressure should not be applied when scrubbing the instruments. Stainless-steel bristles should not be used on insulated or coated instruments as they may damage the coating or insulation on the instrument. Brass and soft-stainless- steel bristles are tougher than nylon, yet less aggressive than stainless steel and offer another alternative for in between jobs. Always refer to your medical device manufacturer's IFU and cleaning instructions.

**Q** Are reusable brushes more economical than disposable brushes?

**A** While it might seem on the surface that reusable brushes are the most cost effective way to go, it may not always be the case. Product pricing may vary greatly from one manufacturer to another or from GPO or IDN/manufacturer pricing agreements. Each individual system must evaluate and assess usage of each accordingly. Product quality needs to be taken into consideration as well. How many safe uses can you really get out of your reusable brushes? Disposable brushes afford the highest degree of QA and decrease the chances of cross contamination. When assessing cost be careful to include the cost associated with reprocessing brushes. **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 IAHCMM 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.*

