Practice Assist
Strengthening general practice in WA

Fact Sheet

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Using Offsite **Sterilisation**

For many practices, offsite sterilisation may be more cost effective than purchasing and running a steriliser, or using disposable single-use equipment.

As the turnaround time for the reprocessing of equipment is usually slower when performed offsite, more sets of resuable medical devices are required. The actual number of sets required depends on usage patterns and turnaround time.

Definition of sterilisation

Sterilisation is defined as a process intended to destroy or remove all forms of microbial life, including bacteria, viruses and spores.

Infection prevention and control principles

Patients and staff can be exposed to the risk of infection through minor surgery, internal examinations, diagnostic procedures and the administration of medication. Sterilisation is required for resuable medical equipment.

To determine the risk assessment of all medical devices and equipment *The Spaulding Classification* should be applied (see table below).

The instrument and equipment processing risk assessment will take into consideration what is reasonable in the processing of resuable equipment, such as:

- The probability of harm to a patient
- The likely seriousness of the harm
- The feasibility of meeting all processing requirements in the practice
- Complying with the manufacturer's instructions around the recommended use of equipment and products to ensure appropriate sterilisation.

All instruments, material, medications and fluids introduced into usually sterile tissue must be sterile. This includes all instruments used to penetrate skin or mucous membrane. Disinfection by chemical or thermal means is not an acceptable alternative.

Table: *The Spaulding Classification*

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WAPHA WA Primary Health Alliance | RURAL HEALTH WEST

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Agreement between the practice and offsite sterilisation facility

A documented agreement between the practice and offsite sterilisation facility is helpful to detail the arrangements and responsibilities of each party. This includes:

- Responsibilities for washing and packaging used equipment.
- Expected turnaround time.
- Transport.
- Quoted prices.
- Responsible contact person for both organisations.
- Contingencies of process failure.
- A copy of the provider's accreditation certificate.

Procedure for offsite sterilisation

- Place all items in a plastic container appropriately labelled, for example 'contaminated' or 'unsterile resuable medical devices' with a firmly fitting lid when sending to an offsite facility and include a similar container appropriately labelled, for example 'sterilised instruments' or 'sterile resuable medical devices' for the return to the practice.
- Document all items leaving the practice, in the sterilisation log book.
- Arrange delivery of items to the offsite facility and pick-up.
- Items are returned to the practice in a clean plastic container appropriately labelled.
- On return of the items following sterilisation, check the packages thoroughly for intact seals, any damage and complete indicators before signing off in the sterilisation logbook.
- The sterilised instruments should be rotated with the oldest units brought forward, whilst the newly sterilised instruments are to be placed at the back of the cupboard or drawer.

Steriliser logbook

It is necessary to keep a steriliser logbook which contains:

- The details of sterile barrier systems and loads.
- The load number.
- Details of contents of the cycle performed offsite.
- The condition of the sterile barrier systems received back by the practice, and the identity of staff preparing loads for sterilising and releasing loads for use.

Practices and offsite facilities should have an agreed method of reporting to each other any unacceptable loads received.

References

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Infection prevention and control standards (5th edition)

www.racgp.org.au

www.racgp.org.au/download/Documents/Standards/infectionpreventionandcontrolstandards.pdf