Practice Assist
Strengthening general practice in WA

Fact Sheet
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Using an offsite sterilisation facility

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

If this is the case for your practice, you will require additional sets of reusable medical devices and equipment because the turnaround time for sterlisation is usually slower when it's performed offsite.

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 at risk of infection during minor surgery, internal examinations, diagnostic procedures and the administration of medication.

As a result, all equipment, devices, instruments, material, medications and fluids introduced into usually sterile tissue must be sterile, including instruments used to penetrate the skin or mucous membrane. Disinfection by chemical or thermal means is not an acceptable alternative.

Conducting a risk assessment

To determine the appropriate level of processing for specific reusable medical devices and equipment, an appropriate risk assessment is required based on the Spaulding classification.

The risk assessment should take into consideration what is reasonable in the processing of reusable medical devices and 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 regarding the recommended use to ensure appropriate sterilisation.

Documented agreement with offsite facility

Your practice must obtain documentation from the offsite sterilisation facility as evidence that the sterilisation standards have been met.

It is helpful to have a documented agreement between your practice and the offsite facility, detailing the arrangements and responsibilities including the:

- sterilisation and packaging of equipment
- expected turnaround time
- transportation
- quoted prices
- contact person for both organisations
- contingencies for process failure
- facility's accreditation certificate.

Sterilisation logbook

Your practice must keep a record of the offsite sterilising in a sterilisation logbook which contains the:

- details of sterile barrier systems and loads
- load number/s
- details of contents of the cycle performed offsite
- condition of the sterile barrier systems received by your practice
- identity of staff preparing loads for sterilising and releasing loads for use.

Procedure for offsite sterilisation

- Place all used items in a plastic container labelled 'contaminated' or 'unsterile reusable medical devices and equipment' with a firm fitting lid.
- Document all items leaving the practice in the sterilisation logbook.
- Arrange delivery to and from the offsite facility.
- Ensure sterilised items are returned in a clean plastic container, appropriately labelled.
- Check the sterilised items thoroughly for intact seals, any damage and complete indicators before signing off in the sterilisation logbook.
- The sterilised items should be rotated with the oldest brought forward and the newest placed at the back of the cupboard or drawer.

More information about offsite sterilisation

To find out more about offsite sterilisation, refer to the link below to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners *Infection prevention and control standards,* 5th edition.

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

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