INCREASING PATIENT SAFETY THROUGH A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE SPD AND OR

In the current healthcare environment, hospital departments can no longer afford to work in silos. This is arguably most important when it applies to surgical workflows, which require airtight protocols to ensure surgical instruments maintain sterility. When sterile processing departments (SPDs) and OR departments work together they can improve patient outcomes, increase efficiency, empower their employees, and reduce costs.

Industry expert and former SPD manager, Phillip Van Gorp, and OR nurse manager Cathy Cassidy, BSN, RN, CNOR, NE-BC, discussed their perspectives on creating a culture of collaboration.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING PATIENT SAFETY IN THE SURGICAL SETTING?

CATHY: Anyone and everyone involved at each step of the surgical process is responsible. It is a team effort including every member of the team- from sterile processing techs and OR nurses to surgical techs, surgeons and environmental services staff. We all must work together to ensure the safety of our patients.

PHIL: Patient safety is a shared responsibility that begins in the SPD during the sterilization process and then moves to the OR during surgical interventions.

WHAT ARE THE CLINICAL ADVANTAGES OF SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PATIENT SAFETY AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ENHANCE SPD AND OR COLLABORATION?

CATHY: When everyone involved realizes that their focus is the patient, collaboration transforms tedious work into vital work that is integral to ensuring the highest level of patient safety.

In my facility, we cultivate a mindset of shared responsibility through a daily “morning safety huddle” meeting that includes a representative from the SPD. We discuss the cases of the day and the instrumentation needed to ensure all necessary components are fully processed and ready in time. This process makes us more likely to catch errors, prevent surgical site infections (SSIs) and improve patient outcomes.

PHIL: Ultimately, patient safety is the most important clinical advantage of collaboration. By sharing best practices for handling sterile packaging systems (SPS) across departments, proactively checking for new potential causes of SSIs and adding SPS into their risk assessments, OR teams and infection preventionists can continue the work often associated only with SPDs. My SPD and nursing colleagues wrote a Consensus Statement with support from Halyard that has served as a helpful resource on this topic.

It’s also important to implement solutions that enhance efficiency, minimize touchpoints of sterilized surgical instrument trays, and optimize the SPD layout to maximize efficiency. Training all staff on proper SPS tear identification and handling techniques is also foundational to this effort.

HOW CAN WE CREATE A PEOPLE-FIRST CULTURE WHERE CS PROFESSIONALS AND NURSES ARE EMPOWERED TO PRIORITIZE PATIENT SAFETY THROUGH COLLABORATION?

CATHY: Creating a people-first culture starts with the leadership of each department. It may sound obvious, but if collaboration happens at the top, it sets a positive example for the rest of the team. I liaise regularly with the SPD supervisor, and we visit each other in our respective departments to cultivate that relationship. Because our departments work together closely, everyone, at every level, feels comfortable voicing a concern.
PHIL: Because our work happens behind the scenes, SPD staff can feel unrecognized and that there’s a general lack of understanding of the value they bring to patient safety. Celebrating their successes in the OR and fostering opportunities for collaboration allows SPD to provide valuable education and insights. Ultimately, knowledge sharing is crucial to developing a culture where professionals feel empowered to make valuable contributions to patient safety.

WHAT EDUCATIONAL TOOLS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND SPD MANAGERS AND OR NURSE MANAGERS PROVIDE TO THEIR TEAMS?

CATHY: It’s critical that OR nurses and surgical techs possess a strong working knowledge of SPD processes. This can be accomplished through education and training through inservice, and encouraging nursing staff to spend time in the SPD.

PHIL: The field of healthcare is ever-changing and it can be hard to keep up. The subfield of sterile processing is no different. I have found trainings offered by manufacturers on a variety of topics, including sterile processing, to be immensely valuable in providing easily accessible clinical education.

I also recommend sharing education about products, practices and solutions that both departments can benefit from. I recently shared with my colleagues the independently conducted Sterility Maintenance Study funded by Halyard that outlines the ability of sterilization wrap, such as Halyard SMART FOLD®, to more reliably maintain sterility of surgical instruments versus rigid containers.

WHAT ROLE DOES COLLABORATION PLAY IN THE FINANCIAL HEALTH OF THE HOSPITAL?

CATHY: Today, hospitals face serious competition and are operating in an environment of shrinking reimbursements. In order for an institution to remain fiscally healthy, leadership needs to look at where they can create leaner processes, without compromising patient safety.

Experts in different areas can improve the quality and streamline the work, which can result in cost reduction. Collaboration between the departments, training on SPS handling techniques, and OR processes can create mutual understanding help to eliminate the need for instrument reprocessing, and avoid OR delays.

PHIL: Collaboration is almost guaranteed to reduce the number of times instruments, especially those that were never used, need to be reprocessed, which saves both time and money, which are essentially the same when we think about the OR.

Considering the total cost of ownership when evaluating product selection is also critical when it comes to reducing costs. While many professionals believe that reusables save money in the long term, that’s not always the case. During my time at MHealth, we made the decision to use sterilization wrap over rigid containers in our facility. This single-use product reduced reprocessing, eliminated container repair costs and cut down on water consumption, all while increasing patient safety.

Information adapted for the article from two separate phone interviews with Phillip Van Gorp and Cathy Cassidy BSN, RN, CNOR, NE-BC., that took place on July 31, 2018 and August 7, 2018, respectively. Both interviews were moderated by MSL. The information provided is an excerpt from the original phone interviews.

Phillip is the president of Gorp Medical Consulting and Surgical Solution, a sales director for Belintra, and the former sterile processing and supply manager at University of Minnesota Physicians. Halyard has a three-year exclusive dealership agreement with Belintra.

Cathy is an operating room nurse manager in the department of surgical service at Middlesex Hospital, Middletown, CT. Cathy uses SMART FOLD, a Halyard product, in her facility.

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