

Soaking Up the SUDs

Surgery center contracts with reprocessor of single-use devices for reuse.

Historically, most medical devices were designed to be used more than once. Metal, glass and rubber items could be disinfected and reprocessed for countless reuses. In the 1980s, the health care industry shifted to single-use devices (SUDs), often made of plastic, mainly because of convenience and reducing the risk of cross contamination.

“Throwaways replaced permanently reusable surgical tools,” says Dr. Steve Gunderson, CEO/

Medical Director. “With the rising price tags for medical instruments and waste disposal, the pendulum has swung back toward reusing formally disposable items.”

RASC is among the health care providers embracing this trend. We recently started working with Medisiss, a registered third-party medical device reprocessor founded in 1997.

“Reprocessing surgical devices that generally have been deemed disposable offers a tremendous advantage,” Dr. Gunderson says. “In addition to the cost savings, reprocessing these devices is a form of recycling. It pays dividends in waste and community benefit.”

SUDs are intended for, of course, one time. But the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) considers the practice of reprocessing used, open or date-expired devices OK under certain conditions. Twice — in 2000 and again in 2008

— the GAO determined that reprocessed SUDs pose no elevated health risk to patients.

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Third-party reproducers have safely reprocessed approximately 50 million devices, according to the Association of Medical Device Reprocessors. And medical device reprocessing is stringently regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

“Since 2000, the FDA has taken steps to require that reprocessing companies meet higher standards for their products than expected of original-device makers,” Dr. Gunderson explains.

While not all SUDs lend themselves to reprocessing, the variety of devices that are

candidates might surprise you. Many of the durable orthopedic devices are reprocessable, as are a number of devices used in minimally invasive surgery.

RASC sends arthroscopy shavers and abraders, along with orthopedic drill bits, saw blades and burrs to Medisiss for reprocessing. Medisiss takes compression sleeves, laparoscopic/

endoscopic trocars and ultrasonic scalpels as well. The same devices are returned after Medisiss has cleaned, tested, refurbished (if necessary), packaged and sterilized them at a fraction of the cost of buying new ones.

Reprocessable devices cannot withstand unlimited reprocessing cycles. Medisiss validates every aspect of the reprocessing

operation with this limitation in mind. The most that the items we send to Medisiss can be reprocessed is five times.

“Each device must meet the minimum performance specifications, regardless of the number of allowable cycles,” Dr. Gunderson notes. “If the device fails the performance test, it is not returned to the surgery center.”



Did You Know?



The surgery center reported 4,773 patient visits in 2010.