



2019 Infection Prevention & Control

February TOPIC # 1 – Single Use items and caution

Have you ever looked at a single use metal instrument and wondered why it cannot be reused? Do you know that single use items are always labelled as such and also have blue or green handles to tell you they are single use?

I have been prompted to address this issue because of three practice visits late last year where I noted these items lined up for cleaning and sterilising.

What does the TGA say? Effectively it says that if you decide to reprocess these items then you in law are considered the manufacturer and the responsibility that goes with it. Further, you must have validated that the item can be cleaning and sterilised without deteriorating.

What are single use metal instruments made from? They are a mixture of recycled steel and virgin stainless steel – sometimes termed low grade steel. They are all manufactured in Pakistan to a specified standard as required. You can request various finishes according to your surgical needs. They are made fit for purpose and are sterilised using ethylene oxide. They have not been tested to see if they can withstand repeated processing without deteriorating or releasing toxins etc. Their design may mean they have surfaces that cannot be accessed for cleaning.

Can I clean and sterilise single use items? Unless you can prove through testing that you can achieve this, and without deterioration or release of toxins then you cannot prove you can produce a clean, sterile item.

What do I do with used or unused opened single use metal instruments? Dispose. If offering unused items to a patient, be aware they may deteriorate or even break with repeated use and cleaning e.g. scissors may rust, snap etc

Can unused single use opened instrument packs be used elsewhere? Please do not send to the third world - they deserve the same standard that you and I expect.

Is there a risk of infection to patients where I have used reprocessed single use items? This is impossible to say and depends on whether the design and manufacture allows the item to be cleaned and sterilised according to the required standard. The risk at best equals that posed by your correctly processed reusable items (SAL⁻⁶) but given these items are not made for reprocessing, the risk posed may be higher but is difficult to assess - the manufacturers do not test to see if they can be steam sterilised because they are single sue. Obviously, the risk of infection transmission from a processed single use item is not the same as reusing an uncleaned single use item from a patient with a BBVI but any reuse should not be ignored. Patients have a right to know that a less than an item has been incorrectly used and although you have cleaned and sterilised it according to the required standard, there is no guarantee that the item is sterile if the design etc has not allowed cleaning and sterilisation by steam under pressure. It is possible that that the risk of infection transmission may approach that of a reprocessed reusable item but it is difficult to establish this.

MESSAGE – Know your single use items. Dispose at point of use to avoid being mixed up with your reusable items

Please check your sterile instrument storage area for any single use items now and show all staff what they look like and the legal ramifications if they are reused.

Next month - the newly released AS 3816:2018 on Clinical and Related Wastes