



Surgical Decontamination Services Policy Position

Surgical decontamination services are an essential part of achieving safe, high-quality surgical care. In practice these facilities provide cleaning, disinfection and sterilisation to render implants and reusable surgical instruments safe for use.

Decontamination facilities need to operate to the highest standard, ensuring both effective decontamination and a guaranteed supply of instruments to operating theatres. Additionally, these facilities need to be readily available in order to provide immediate decontamination where necessary – for example in the event of a contaminated instrument or implant that cannot be replaced. Patient care is the priority, and operations postponed or aborted due to a shortage of available clean instruments should be almost entirely avoidable.

Following the launch of a national strategy for modernising the provision of decontamination services in 2003, the centralisation of decontamination services - a core component of the strategy - has resulted in pooling of facilities for several nearby hospitals, at an alternative location from the hospital sites.

In order to operate a safe decontamination service for patients, the college strongly recommends the following:

- The retention of appropriate on-site decontamination services where either elective or emergency surgery is likely to require immediate decontamination of a surgical instrument or an implant.
- On-site and off-site facilities are compliant with modern standards and operated and managed by personnel who are trained to a national standard.
- There needs to be clear communication between the decontamination facility and theatre staff, for example the day before surgery.
- A set of instruments available for every surgical procedure as back up, to ensure that an operation can continue if original instruments are found to be inappropriate or are contaminated in the operating theatre.
- We note however that there will be circumstances such as an emergency situation or one requiring specialised instruments where this might not be possible. Procedures should be in place to minimise the risk in these circumstances where spare instruments are not available.

- A full risk assessment within each hospital or facility undertaking surgical procedures to ensure appropriate decontamination services exist and review on an annual basis, as an essential part of Trust policy. This should also be part of major incident planning.
- A requirement for surgeons to follow Trust procedures to report instances in which inadequate decontamination services have led to patient care being compromised. Trusts must escalate the reported decontamination issues as appropriate.

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