

“Flash Sterilization”—Avoid Confusion in Sterilization Terms

Recommendation

The term “flash sterilization” has caused confusion. To avoid misunderstanding, the American Academy of Ophthalmology strongly recommends that ophthalmologists and centers performing ophthalmic surgery avoid the term “flash sterilization,” and instead use in its place a more specific description of the sterilization methods followed within hospitals, ambulatory surgicenters and doctors’ offices. Many times these methods are “full cycle, FDA-approved sterilizer manufacturer recommended” sterilization. The various sterilizer devices available today have FDA-approved cycles that meet the criteria for elimination of microbial activity and replication.¹

Background

The Academy is co-chairing a Sterilization Task Force with the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery, through efforts of its Quality of Care and Knowledge Base Development Secretariat. This task force has met with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) to discuss its sterilization criteria for accreditation. The task force is providing information to the Joint Commission about the unique characteristics of ophthalmic surgeries and instrumentation and the rate of surgical site infections in ophthalmology. The goal of the task force is to arrive at a common understanding with the Joint Commission about the types and safety of sterilization practices used in ophthalmic surgery centers.

Processes for rendering surgical instruments safe for use are a critical activity in infection control. These processes include decontamination and manual cleaning, inspection and assembly, packaging, sterilization and quality control, and storage of instruments. Sterilization is defined as the complete elimination of all forms of microbial life, including bacterial spores.² This can be accomplished by several methods, including steam under pressure, dry heat, ethylene oxide gas and liquid chemicals. Proper preparation (cleaning, decontamination, etc.) of instruments is important for effective sterilization.

Summary

In order to avoid confusion as to the technique used for sterilization, the Academy recommends abandoning the term “flash” and describing the sterilization technique in detail.

References

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Devices and Radiological Health. 510(k) Premarket Notification Database Search for various sterilizer devices. Available at: <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMN/pmn.cfm>. Accessed April 21, 2008.
 2. Rutula WA. Disinfection and Flash Sterilization in the Operating Room. J Ophthalmic Nurs Technol 1991;10:106-15.
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