



Critical Connections: Improving SP and OR Synergy

BY CODY MCELROY

Learning Objectives

1. Outline best practices to improve operating room and sterile processing efficiencies
2. Outline four principles for effective communication
3. Overcome challenges and build synergy

Contributed by:

 **STERIS**

In the intricate dance of hospital operations, the relationship between Sterile Processing (SP) and the Operating Room (OR) is often likened to that of a service provider and its customer. The OR places orders for surgical cases, and SP dutifully delivers the necessary instruments and supplies. The efficiency and precision of SP's work directly impact the success of the OR's procedures. However, this dynamic is far from one-sided. The performance and demands of the OR equally influence the effectiveness of SP. This symbiotic partnership underscores the mutual dependency, with each department playing a crucial role in the other's success.

The OR plays a pivotal role in maintaining the efficiency of the SP team, starting with proper instrument care at the point of use. When instruments have difficult to clean soils or are damaged or misplaced, it hampers the processing team's ability to clean and prepare devices efficiently, leading to delays. The OR can significantly support the SP team by taking a few proactive measures.

Protect Instrumentation

- Use instruments for their intended purpose. How often have fine tissue scissors cut sutures or lens become levers?
- Never use saline solutions to wipe or soak instrumentation as it is highly corrosive.

- Manage with proper care and handling.

Adopt practices that reduce processing time in SP

- Remove debris early to prevent drying and caked on soils
- Flushing debris from lumens during the procedure
- Soaking items with solutions like sterile water between uses
- Use anti-stick solutions to reduce eschar build-up on electrosurgical tips
- Organize returning instrumentation
- Sort instruments into their original containers
- Discard disposable items
- Group sharp items and align tips
- Protect delicate instrumentation during handling and placement
- Use pretreatment products
- Gels and foams prevent drying, making cleaning more efficient
- Vials that are pre-filled with a neutral pH enzymatic detergent protect tips and loosen tough to remove soils

The SSP team plays a crucial role in maintaining OR efficiency. It begins with meticulous assembly and thorough inspection of instrumentation. A missing instrument can cause significant disruption in the OR, delaying procedure start times as staff search for replacements.

Nonfunctional instruments discovered during a procedure can harm the patient and extend the procedure time. By ensuring that all instruments are present and functional, the SP team enables the OR team to operate at optimal efficiency. The SP team can greatly enhance the OR team's efficiency by implementing just a few key measures.

Manage inventory to prevent shortages

- Maintaining an accurate inventory of instrument sets and supplies helps prevent OR shortages

Complete and organized trays to help instrument counts in the OR

- Locate or replace missing instrumentation
- Maintain preference cards
- Keep like instrumentation together and standardize instrument placement

Ensure clean and functioning instrumentation

- Cutting tests for scissor and other sharp instrumentation
- Residual soil testing tools using borescopes and residual protein soil tests
- Identifying and removing damaged and nonfunctional instrumentation

Lesson:

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Quiz Answers:

1. B, 2. C, 3. B, 4. D, 5. D, 6. C, 7. A, 8. C, 9. B, 10. C

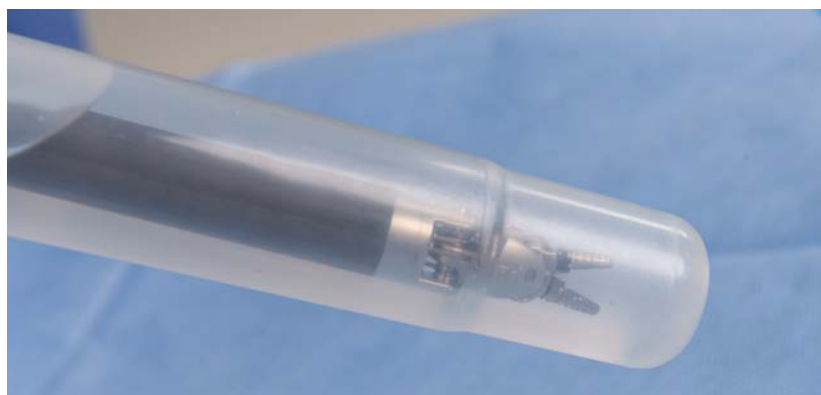


Figure 1: Vial filled with detergent loosens tough soils.

Four Principles of Communication

Communication is the key to a great partnership. It is the foundation of collaboration between SP and OR staff. Effective communication is built upon four principles: empathy, active listening, clarity, and openness.

Empathy requires understanding of the other teams' experiences and having sensitivity to their thoughts and feelings. To accomplish this, team members must use active listening. Active listening is the practice of hearing and understanding the other party. The goal is to acknowledge how they feel and understand what they are saying.

For empathy and active listening to work, the communication must be clear and concise. It's important to avoid generalities and demeaning speech, instead focusing on the facts of the situation.

Lastly, communication must be open. Anything and everything should be discussed through the lens of mutual respect and trust. Only then can OR and SP teams effectively communicate.

“While the collaboration between SP and OR teams can be complex, overcoming common challenges through shared goals and proactive communication can significantly enhance the relationship.”

Often the communication between OR and SP involves a stressful experience. Take for example a nonfunctioning device found during the procedure. The OR reaches out to SP for a replacement to be sent immediately. Accusations begin with SP blaming the OR team for damaging the device and the OR team stating that the SP team is not doing their job. This situation is an opportunity to improve communication.

Implementing a systematic tagging system for surgical instruments and trays can bridge the communication gap. By using tags in the OR to indicate broken items or instruments needing sharpening, SP staff can quickly address issues without unnecessary guesswork or miscommunication from oral communication. These communication tags also create a visual queue, allowing SP teams to prioritize repairs or replacements, further reducing delays in instrument preparation.

The process fosters a sense of shared responsibility between departments, as both OR and SP staff contribute



Figure 2: Reporting heavily soiled instruments is an important part of SP feedback for OR staff.

to maintaining instrument integrity. Moreover, clear communication ensures that all parties are aligned in their goal of achieving optimal surgical outcomes.

Overcoming Challenges and Building Synergy

While the collaboration between SP and OR teams can be complex, overcoming common challenges through shared goals and proactive communication can significantly enhance the relationship. Strategies include:

- **Fostering a Cooperative Environment:** Encouraging teamwork through cross-departmental training sessions where SP and OR staff can better understand each other's workflows and challenges.
- **Adopting Real-World Case Studies:** Learning from successes and setbacks in similar surgical settings can provide actionable insights into enhancing interdepartmental synergy.

By prioritizing this collaboration, both teams can contribute to higher standards of patient care and operational efficiency.

To build and sustain an effective partnership between SP and OR staff, establishing a robust feedback loop is essential. This feedback mechanism should include regular reviews of performance, highlighting what each department is doing well and identifying areas for improvement. For instance:

- **SP Feedback for OR Staff:** Reporting on improperly sorted or heavily soiled instruments, highlighting successes in point-of-use practices, and suggesting targeted training if recurring issues arise.
- **OR Feedback for SP Staff:** Providing input on instrument sterilization quality, turnaround times, and overall readiness of surgical trays.

Acting on this feedback is equally important. Regular team meetings, training sessions, and collaborative workshops can address identified challenges and reinforce best practices. Providing metrics from both sides can assist each team with setting actionable goals. This feedback loop not only fosters mutual respect but also creates a culture of accountability and continuous learning.

Elevating Standards for Patient Care

The synergy between the SP and OR teams is critical for achieving optimal patient outcomes. By implementing point-of-use best practices, leveraging effective communication tools, and fostering a culture of feedback and continuous improvement, these departments can work together seamlessly. Critical collaboration between SP and OR staff lays the foundation for safer, more efficient patient care. **HPN**

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Critical Connections: Improving SP and OR Synergy - Practice Quiz

- What is the primary focus of the partnership between the SP and OR?**
 - Increasing hospital revenue
 - Ensuring optimal patient outcomes and operational efficiency
 - Training new surgical staff
 - Reducing hospital waste
- Which point-of-use solution should never be used on surgical instruments due to its corrosive nature?**
 - Neutral pH enzymatic detergent
 - Sterile water
 - Saline
 - Anti-stick phospholipid solution
- What do anti-stick solutions help achieve during surgical procedures?**
 - Sterilizing instruments mid-surgery
 - Reducing eschar build-up on electrosurgical instrument tips
 - Cleaning protein soils off endoscopes
 - Lubricating robotic devices
- Which instrument organization steps help sterile processing efficiencies?**
 - Sort instruments into their original containers
 - Discard disposable items
 - Group sharp items and align tips
 - All of the above
- What can sterile processing do to help instrument counts in the OR?**
 - Use borescopes
 - Identify damaged instrumentation
 - Cutting tests
 - Replace missing instrumentation
- What is needed to have effective communication?**
 - Empathy and concise language
 - Active listening and generalities
 - Openness and clarity
 - Identifying blame and reconciliation
- How can tagging systems improve communication between SP and OR teams?**
 - Fosters responsibility in both departments
 - Identifies sterile processing failures
 - Tracks disposable surgical items used
 - Eliminates the need for verbal communication entirely
- What is an essential component of the feedback loop between SP and OR staff?**
 - Limiting communication to emergencies only
 - Holding one-sided performance reviews
 - Regularly reviewing performance and identifying areas for improvement
 - Eliminating cross-departmental training
- What is a recommended strategy for fostering a cooperative environment between SP and OR teams?**
 - Creating separate workflows for each department
 - Conducting cross-departmental training sessions
 - Avoiding discussions of workflow challenges
 - Prioritizing verbal communication alone
- What is the ultimate benefit of enhancing collaboration between SP and OR teams?**
 - Faster emergency response times
 - Reduced need for surgical training sessions
 - Elevating standards for patient care
 - Increased hospital staff retention rates