Recommended Practices for Cleaning and Processing Flexible Endoscopes and Endoscope Accessories

The following recommended practices were developed by the AORN Recommended Practices Committee and have been approved by the AORN Board of Directors. They were presented as proposed recommendations for comments by members and others. They are effective January 1, 2009.

These recommended practices are intended as achievable recommendations representing what is believed to be an optimal level of practice. Policies and procedures will reflect variations in practice settings and/or clinical situations that determine the degree to which the recommended practices can be implemented. AORN recognizes the various settings in which perioperative nurses practice. These recommended practices are intended as guidelines adaptable to various practice settings. These practice settings include traditional operating rooms, ambulatory surgery centers, physician's offices, cardiac catheterization laboratories, endoscopy suites, radiology departments, and all other areas where surgery may be performed.

Purpose

These recommended practices provide guidelines to assist personnel in the care, cleaning, decontamination, maintenance, handling, storage, sterilization, and/or disinfection of flexible endoscopes and related accessories. Use of these recommended practices will assist personnel in providing a safe environment for patients and health care workers.

These recommended practices are based on the most current evidence available at the time of development. They should be used to develop policies and procedures for care of flexible endoscopes and accessories in the practice setting. As new information becomes available, perioperative nurses should consult with infection preventionists and epidemiologists to review and revise procedures as appropriate. These recommended practices pertain only to flexible endoscopes and are divided into the following sections:

- following manufacturer's instructions,
- precleaning,
- transport to decontamination,
- leak testing,
- cleaning,
- high-level disinfection
- alcohol treatment,
- drying,
- storage,
- handling damaged flexible endoscopes,
- care of accessories, and
- personal protective equipment (PPE).

Competencies, documentation, policies and procedures, and quality management suggestions also are discussed. For more information on the care and cleaning of rigid endoscopes and related equipment, refer to the AORN "Recommended practices for care and cleaning of instruments and powered surgical equipment."[1]

Recommendation I

Flexible endoscopes should be cleaned and stored in accordance with the manufacturer's written instructions.

Failure to follow the manufacturer's written instructions could result in ineffective cleaning that interferes with high-level disinfection or sterilization, creating a risk of infection for the patient. The manufacturer's warranty may be void if the written instructions for care and use of the device are not followed.

I.a. The manufacturer's written instructions for flexible endoscopes and all accessories should be followed regarding
- cleaning processes,
- selection of cleaning product,
- selection of disinfectant/sterilization products,
- use of alcohol, and
- compatibility with automatic endoscope reprocessors.

Flexible endoscopes manufactured by different companies require different cleaning processes as described in the manufacturer's written instructions. The flexible endoscope manufacturer is required to demonstrate to the US Food and Drug Administration in the premarket clearance application that the cleaning/disinfecting instructions are adequate and that the results are reproducible.[2] All flexible endoscopes and accessories cannot be processed successfully in all automatic endoscopic reprocessors.[3]

I.b. High-level disinfectant and chemical cleaner manufacturers' written instructions should be followed regarding