Keep Control Of Your Fluid Waste

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Fluid waste control is crucial to the safety of OR patients and personnel. It also can pose a serious financial concern for the hospital, making finding a way to dispose of potentially infectious fluid waste safely and effectively of utmost importance.

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In any given procedure, surgical professionals must be aware of a multitude of issues. Unfortunately, one of the often-troublesome by-products of a surgical procedure is fluid waste that presents yet another safety issue. The blood, irrigation solutions, and bodily fluids that can result from a procedure can pose a serious mess and infection risk for OR personnel.

According to an article [1] written by Stanley R. Shelver, RN, MHA, not only is the infection and safety risk associated with fluid waste something to be dealt with, but the financial responsibility associated with proper disposal of this waste can be burdensome for a hospital. “New federal regulations for transporting hazardous biological wastes mean even greater cost pressures for healthcare managers charged with disposal of infectious fluids, motivating many to seek new alternatives to past disposal practices,” he says. “Incineration costs continue to increase, as do annual license fees demanded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).”

Historically, hospitals have utilized various methods for removing fluid waste—mostly in the form of disposable solutions. For example, hospitals may collect surgical fluid in a canister and combine the contents with a powder-like substance to solidify the fluid and pour it in a drain. The infection risks associated with the pouring method are high—involving surgical professionals to manually handle the waste. Because of this risk, the pouring of fluid waste has been essentially prohibited since 1991 with the implementation of OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

Other disposal options have included collecting the waste in canisters, placing in red bags and having the bags hauled away. This can pose an issue for hospitals facing high-costs associated with getting the waste collected, and regulatory standards regarding weight, size and the number of canisters that can be placed in a bag. Additionally, this option still requires hospital personnel to manually handle the waste, creating an infection risk for anyone involved.

With added financial pressure on most hospitals these days, surgical professionals are looking to change their fluid waste control practices to remain compliant with all regulatory standards, keep personnel and patient as safe as possible while still achieving cost savings. The solution, some would argue, is in finding a reusable way to dispose of fluids in the OR with minimal personnel contact.

According to Shelver, some hospitals are turning to “engineered controls for safe disposal of fluid medical waste onsite” to achieve these goals. Examples of such solutions include MD Technologies’ Environ-mate™ DM6000 Series Suction-Drain™ Systems, which offers the ability to dispose of fluid directly from the suction field to the sewer, isolating staff from exposure while also eliminating costs the associated with disposable supplies and waste disposal.

Bemis Health Care’s Quick-Drain Systems provide the same, reusable benefits for the disposal of liquid infectious waste with the ability to drain a large-volume canister (12,200 cc and above) of fluid. The fluid waste goes directly into the sanitary sewer and connects to the existing plumbing of the hospital.

Another example of these systems is in Stryker’s Neptune Waste Management System, a closed-system that can be used from case-to-case. Essentially, it collects the fluid waste during procedures and is emptied into a docking station that connects to a facility’s plumbing and cleans itself for the next day’s use. Unlike some other reusable systems that may be mounted on the OR wall, the Neptune system is on wheels for portability within the OR suite.

These product solutions are just a few of many technological solutions available to surgical professionals today for disposal of fluid waste. While reusable waste control systems may require a larger initial capital investment by the hospital, it seems more and more ORs may be turning to these reusable, self-contained systems for their potential long-term cost savings benefits. Additionally, the safety and sanitary benefits associated with reusable waste systems—with minimal personnel exposure—could prove to be the solution for OR fluid waste control into the future.

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