Purchasing Tips: Surgical Gowns & Drapes

Surgical gowns and drapes are crucial materials to maintaining infection control practices and keeping surgical patients and staff safe. Choosing the right materials for your facility is important in terms of budget and safety. In the January/February issue of *Surgical Products*, we asked manufacturers of these materials: What are the top three considerations surgical professionals should make when purchasing surgical gowns and drapes? Here Jay Hexamer, General Manager of Global Medical Supplies for Kimberly-Clark Health Care answers that question.

1. Choosing the right level of protection. A clear understanding of the types of procedures that a facility performs most is one of the most important factors when purchasing surgical gowns and drapes. Procedures of varying length, complexity and exposure pose different levels of risk for strikethrough, linting, fire, etc, which should be drivers of purchasing decisions around any type of protective apparel. For example, caregivers involved in a fluid-intensive orthopedic procedure will have very different requirements from those performing a lower-fluid, shorter duration hernia repair.

By selecting the right barrier specific to the procedure at hand, materials managers can feel confident that they are protecting their patients and staff with the best possible product while not overspending on unnecessary gowns or drapes.

2. Comfort. The comfortability of a surgical gown can play a significant role in the surgeon’s performance. The same qualities or attributes that makes surgical gowns effective can also make for a pretty uncomfortable experience during surgery. One important factor in a gown’s comfort is its breathability. OR staff members can be in surgery for hours and their comfort is important part of their ability to maintain their focus.

To help purchasers determine the breathability level of a specific gown, we encourage them to perform a “breathability” test. For example, our scientists have recently developed a new “breathability” test. During a demonstration, an indicator strip will change color to show the rate at which vapors are allowed to pass through the gown fabric.

3. Waste reduction and green factor. In recent years, many hospitals and surgery centers have become more aware of their impact on landfill waste and are looking for ways to reduce their medical waste levels.

We encourage hospitals to look at ways of streamlining their purchasing and supply stock through ORUR’s, which are utilization reviews designed to help hospitals determine the best mix of products and, in the process, reduce supply waste and unnecessary spending.

Purchasers should also examine the manufacturing process as well as the fabric’s weight, which affects the facility’s disposal costs. The lighter the fabric, the less material goes into the landfill. This in turn can help reduce the facility’s disposal costs.

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