Preventing Perioperative Hypothermia

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Patients have several strikes against them from the start in the surgical environment. In surgery they are naked, anesthetized, in a cold room and perhaps receiving cold IV and/or irrigation fluids. All of these factors can lead to inadvertent perioperative hypothermia. (Hypothermia defined as a core temperature below 36 degrees C or 96.8 degrees F).

Perioperative hypothermia can be mitigated with some very basic precautions, including preventing its onset by covering the patient with warmed cotton blankets pre and post-surgery. Here it is important to choose a vendor that makes a piece of equipment that can warm the blankets to 200 degrees F as lower temperatures are not as useful1 and most manufacturers only heat to a max of 160 degrees F.

In addition to the pre and post-operative precautions of using warmed blankets to prevent heat loss, surgical professionals should also ensure that their IV and irrigation fluids are warmed. This means finding a vendor who has been cleared by the FDA to warm both IV and irrigation fluids, as not all vendors are.

Operating room personnel should also look for a vendor that has extremely tight specifications on their cabinet temperatures. This is extremely important, because fluid manufacturers are very specific regarding the temperature and duration of warming for their fluids, as overheated fluids pose a danger to the patient.

Finally, surgical professionals should look for a vendor that provides fluid warming devices that have the capability to document the actual internal temperature of their warming cabinets, not just the display temperature.

In addition, and most important from a regulated documentation standpoint, the vendors' fluid warming devices should be able to provide six months of data in a report that is a downloadable, permanent archival record of all of the following information related to the performance of the device; dates in record, number of temperature readings, frequency of readings, mode of fluid warming, set-point temperature, average temperature, temperature ranges, confirmation of accuracy of temperature monitoring, software version, as well as the make, model, serial number and date of manufacture of the device.

The features listed above will be found only from the vendors who specialize in the manufacture of warming cabinets.

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