

SOP: Surgical Instrument Count and Disposal Procedures

Purpose

This SOP defines the **surgical instrument count and disposal procedures** to ensure accurate tracking of all instruments before, during, and after surgical procedures. It includes standardized counting protocols, verification steps among surgical team members, documentation requirements, and safe disposal methods for single-use and damaged instruments. The purpose is to prevent retained surgical items, maintain sterile field integrity, and promote patient safety by minimizing infection risks and ensuring compliance with healthcare regulations.

Scope

Applicable to all operating room (OR) staff involved in surgical procedures, including surgeons, scrub nurses/techs, and circulating nurses in [Facility Name].

Responsibilities

- **Scrub Nurse/Technician:** Perform and document instrument count, report discrepancies.
- **Circulating Nurse:** Verify counts, document in patient records, and facilitate proper disposal procedures.
- **Surgeon:** Participate in verification and address discrepancies before closure.

Procedures

1. Preoperative Instrument Count

1. Prepare standardized instrument count sheet prior to surgery.
2. Scrub and circulating nurses count all instruments together, audibly and visually.
3. Record initial count on the count sheet and patient chart.
4. Confirm instrument packs as intact and unopened, or note discrepancies.

2. Intraoperative Counts

1. Perform counts at the following critical points:
 - Before closure of any cavity or layer.
 - At the start of wound closure.
 - At the end of the procedure.
2. Counts must be performed by both scrub and circulating nurses, communicated audibly and visually.
3. If additional instruments are opened, document and add to count sheet.

3. Postoperative Count and Reconciliation

1. Final count performed before and after skin closure.
2. Verify instrument count against initial records. Resolve discrepancies immediately.
3. If an item is missing:
 - Notify the surgeon immediately.
 - Initiate systematic search, including surgical field, drapes, garbage, and instrument trays.
 - Obtain intraoperative imaging if unresolved.
 - Document incident and actions taken.
4. Ensure both nurses and surgeon confirm count completion prior to patient leaving OR.

4. Disposal Procedures

1. Segregate single-use instruments (disposables) from reusable ones immediately post-procedure.
2. Place single-use and damaged instruments in appropriate, clearly labeled sharps or biohazard containers.
3. Reusable instruments to be sent to central sterile processing for decontamination per facility protocol.
4. Document disposal actions and quantities in count sheet and patient record.

Documentation

- Maintain completed instrument count sheets in patient records.
- Document all count results, additional instruments, discrepancies, and resolutions in the patient chart.
- Report and document lost instruments/incidents according to facility's adverse event policy.

Compliance & Review

- This SOP will be reviewed annually or as changes in practice or regulations occur.
- Non-compliance must be reported to the OR supervisor and/or risk management.

References

- Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) Guidelines
- Facility Infection Control and Safety Policies
- Relevant regional/national health authority regulations