

Passing & Loading Sharps Devices – Week 2

We as health care workers are taught to put the patients' safety before our own. But caregiver's safety is as important. Poor work practices in the OR can endanger both staff and patients, and the improper use of sharp instruments is a prime example. Sterile sharps are an injury threat, but once contaminated with blood or bodily fluids, they may be a health threat as well. Common OR conditions such as poor visibility, restricted movement areas, feelings of anxiety, fatigue and frustration, as well as the need for speed, create an environment where sharps-related injuries are all too common. When dedicated observers are placed in the OR, studies reveal that sharps injuries occur in 7% - 15% of the surgeries, most of which occur from either scalpel blades or suture needles.

According to surgeon Mark Davis, a leading expert in OR safety, "the use of hand-held *straight suture needles* is associated with a reported injury rate of 17%, an unnecessary risk since safer alternatives exist." Wire sutures are associated with high injury rates as well. Injuries are likely to occur while performing maneuvers such as mounting/repositioning the needle, assembling/disassembling the device, manual tissue retraction or wound exposure, holding the needle in either the hand or needle holder while tying, and passing hand-to-hand between team members. **Twenty-five percent of suture needle injuries and more than 50% of scalpel blade injuries occur during passing.**

Sharps injuries occur in multiple directions; some are self-inflicted, some are inflicted by others. With injuries involving scalpel blades, 39% are self-inflicted, whereas 61% are inflicted **ON** another worker **BY** the person using the device. With injuries involving suture needles, 33% are **ON** another worker **BY** the person using the device.

Sharps-related injuries can be prevented if good technique is used. Are the following techniques part of your routine practices?

Safe Loading Techniques

- Assemble & disassemble instruments slowly and carefully
- Mount/remove scalpel blades/needles with safety devices – **Never with Fingers**
- Prepare in advance whenever possible

Safe Passing Techniques

- Pass instruments so they are received in a position **Ready for Use**
- Be aware of visual fields for all staff involved in passing of sharps devices
- Communicate clearly and openly

[Insert a quote from management or health care worker (Surgeon/Assistant/STSR) on the importance of practicing safe/correct passing and loading technique.]

Additional information on safe OR practices and procedures is available from Dr. Mark Davis' book entitled, "Advanced Precautions for Today's OR. The Operating Room Professional's Handbook for the Prevention of Sharps Injuries and Bloodborne Exposures."