Sterile Processing In Healthcare Facilities
Preparing for Accreditation Surveys

Rose Seavey

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Dedication

To all of my colleagues fighting the good fight every day and following best practices in reprocessing reusable medical devices to make patient care safer.

Acknowledgments

While creating this manual, I had the great opportunity to work with Judy Veale, an exceptional editor. Judy is an extremely talented editor and researcher, and this book would not have been possible without her expertise, commitment, and guidance. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the reviewers of this second edition of Sterile Processing In Healthcare Facilities: Preparing for Accreditation Surveys for their thoughtful suggestions and ideas—Robert H. Stiefel, MS, CCE; John Rosing, MAH, FACHE; Cynthia Spry, MA, MSN, RN, CNOR, CSIT; and Martha Young, BS, MS, CSPDT.

Thank you,

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The purpose of this guidance document is to help healthcare professionals prepare for an accrediting agency survey as it relates to the sterile processing of surgical instruments and other medical devices in healthcare settings. Accreditation agencies include The Joint Commission (TJC), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the American Association of Accreditation for Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF), the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Healthcare (AAAHC), the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC), the American Osteopathic Association/Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program (AOA/HFAP), the Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP), DNV Healthcare (DNV), and state departments of health.

The accreditation process is designed to help healthcare facilities take a systems approach to evaluating their care processes and improving those processes for the betterment of patient care and safety. Each accreditation organization has accreditation standards and supporting documents that healthcare facilities can review before a survey. In general, the resources provided by accreditation organizations include all standards related to the healthcare facility as a whole. Sterile Processing in Healthcare Facilities: Preparing for Accreditation Surveys summarizes the standards and associated documents related to the reprocessing of reusable medical devices.

This document contains valuable tools for preparing for accreditation surveys and maintaining compliance with accreditation requirements as they relate to sterile processing. These tools include information on accreditation organizations and requirements, information on relevant evidence-based guidelines published by professional organizations, a step-by-step guide to preparation for a survey, guidelines on risk reduction, and an example of a sterile processing auditing tool. New to this second edition are best-practices audit tools for intermediate-use steam sterilization (IUSS) and high-level disinfection (HLD).
Today’s healthcare accreditation processes are conducted with a focus on the safety and quality of patient care. Sterilization and high-level disinfection (HLD) in healthcare facilities is a major focus of the accreditation survey process.

Various agencies and professional organizations perform accreditation surveys to evaluate healthcare facilities and the healthcare professionals practicing in those facilities. During the accreditation process, surveyors assess competency, ethics, and practices to verify that current published standards are being met. If a facility meets all the necessary requirements and is appropriately qualified, it passes the survey and is awarded a certification. The accreditation process, procedures, and requirements for certification vary depending on the accrediting organization and the type of facility (e.g., hospital, medical center, ambulatory care facility, physician’s office, home care provider, medical laboratory).

Accreditation is a means of peer review by professionals (e.g., administrators, physicians, nurses, engineers) and is aimed at high standards that usually exceed state and federal requirements. Accreditation is a universally accepted means of enhancing the quality of healthcare. Many private insurers require accreditation as a condition of reimbursement. To qualify for federal funding for patients in Medicare and Medicaid programs, healthcare facilities must demonstrate that they comply with the government’s hospital Conditions of Participation (CoP).

One of the key advantages of accreditation is the structure that is provided for improvement of performance and safety. When there is the expectation of the measurement of performance and safety by an accrediting organization, conformance to standards and recommended practices becomes more important to healthcare facilities. Recognized standards and recommended practices are built on sound principles, scientific research and data, and the opinions of experts in the field. Following these best practices helps to ensure the quality and safety of patient care. In addition, reimbursement is affected by accreditation or lack of accreditation; therefore, lack of accreditation can put a facility out of business.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on infection prevention in healthcare. Healthcare professionals have increased their efforts to reduce healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), particularly surgical site infections (SSIs). The Joint Commission’s (TJC’s) National Patient Safety Goals (NPSGs) and national initiatives by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other organizations to reduce HAIs are two examples of why sterilization and HLD are under the spotlight with accreditation agencies. In addition, both TJC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have clarified their expectations regarding sterile processing in healthcare facilities.1,2
This guidance document covers accreditation standards that pertain to sterilization and HLD in healthcare facilities, as well as the nationally accepted standards and recommended practices that constitute best practices in reprocessing. Accreditation by TJC and CMS will be covered in some depth. Accreditation programs focusing on ambulatory care facilities and sponsored by the American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF) and the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) will also be discussed, as well as the accreditation programs of the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC), the American Osteopathic Association/Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program (AOA/HFAP), the Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP), and DNV Healthcare and the role of state health departments.