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Fighting infection through single-use medical accessories amidst pandemic

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COVID-19 has redefined healthcare for the world. The crisis does not end at fighting the virus alone. Patients seeking medical interventions for other diseases can also be prone to cross-infection due to overcrowding of the hospitals treating COVID-19 patients. The infection risk is higher in patients who require insertion of any kind of medical device in their body. The use of all equipment in surgical and non-surgical procedures needs to be carried out in a hygienic manner. For example, someone suffering from gastrointestinal diseases requires endoscopy for a complete diagnosis.

Now, a procedure like an endoscopy can expose a patient to various bacterial infection during the procedure if proper precautions are not taken. In many cases, where devices are being reused, there are increased chances of cross-contamination. Therefore, times like these call for devices to be used only once, as recommended to prevent infection.

Medical accessories - Once or again

Given the scenario, it is imperative that healthcare professionals shall start to move away from using reusable devices and components to avoid cross-contamination. Although the choice between reusable devices and disposable products is apparent in most of the cases, still healthcare providers consider it as a multi-faceted decision-making process. The prime cause for the situation is the cost as clinicians are asked to reuse the accessories to cut down cost burden for the patients. Therefore, following disinfection protocol, they go ahead with the procedure even at the risk of patients contracting an infection. In fact, there are dedicated agencies that work for reprocessing of medical devices that include sterilization and repackaging. This practise not only compromises the functionality of the device but exposes a patient to residual contamination. The reprocessing of medical accessories involves expensive steps like cleaning, rinsing, drying and high-level disinfection, yet cost optimization favors reuse over new device.

When it comes to single-use devices, there is no regulation in India, however, The Drugs and Cosmetics Act (Rule 65.17) has given guidelines that the devices must be used as per the label instructions. Interestingly there is reprocessing of devices in big numbers, which lead to the clinicians using the sterilized medical accessories, causing poor patient outcomes.

As per studies in 45% of the cases, when the medical practitioners are using equipment, they skip important steps in the cleaning process, causing failure of disinfection. Any breach in these processes can risk patient safety. Thus, the allocation of resources to prevent infection during a procedure is of paramount importance and an entire shift to single-use devices from reusable devices is advisable. This will not only help to increase the efficacy of the diagnosis, treatments and infection control to a large extent but will also ensure transparency in the ecosystem.

Hence, there is a need to adapt to smarter ways that do not put patient safety at stake, which is where single-use equipment like Biopsy Forceps, Snares for Tissue Resection, Dilatation Balloons, Sclerotherapy Needles etc. come into play. They are disposable, and they substantially reduce the risk of infection. Today, when we are battling an invisible virus our healthcare delivery needs to be even more updated as per the situation and adopt stringent safety protocols such as the use of single-use medical accessories that will help keep infection at bay, ensuring utmost patient safety.

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