



How New COVID-19 Recommendations Can (Positively) Impact Sterile Processing

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As the nation grapples with the spread of the **COVID-19** (Coronavirus), healthcare systems across the country are scrambling to put plans into place to handle an unprecedented number of patients. The actual number of those who could become infected is uncertain, but we do know the speed that this virus has spread across the globe has been extraordinary. The US is experiencing a market meltdown, widespread panic buying that's leaving grocery store shelves bare, and numbers of those infected that haven't been seen since the outbreak of influenza in 1957.¹

At the same time, healthcare systems and their leaders have a unique opportunity to face this challenge head on. On March 14, the US Surgeon General, Jerome Adams, urged hospitals to postpone elective surgical procedures amid concerns of spreading **COVID-19** to healthcare workers who will be needed to manage the surge of those infected.² With an estimated 2.8 hospital beds per 1,000 people in the US, this recommendation makes sense. But it's not just a need for more beds. Ventilators will be key to treating those most affected by this pandemic. With an estimated 160,000 ventilators, what will health systems do if they are faced with a surge of patients requiring ventilator support? Some have suggested using anesthesia machines as ventilators should a hospital have the need; unfortunately, an anesthesiologist or certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) is required to manage those machines because most nurses are unfamiliar with their operation.

Opportunities for SPD

By reducing or postponing elective surgeries, healthcare systems can reset and refocus their efforts, concentrating their staff in hardest hit areas. For employees in Sterile Processing, postponing elective surgery gives them and their department a much-needed respite from the ongoing pressures to keep up with the demands of surgery and procedural departments. The Sterile Processing department will have a unique opportunity to perform all tasks that are often pushed off because of the demands to terminally clean durable medical equipment and re-sterilize instrumentation. If elective surgery is limited or stopped at one's facility until further notice, SP leaders should take this opportunity to do a thorough deep cleaning of their departments, organize and improve workflows, make the necessary repairs to instruments and containers, and begin rotating their instrument sets through their maintenance programs. Keeping instruments functioning properly is a key way to improve surgeon satisfaction, but it isn't always managed effectively because of low inventories and high demands.

In addition, this is a great time for managers to meet with their employees. It's a perfect opportunity to take time to engage with staff members, give them some undivided attention, update them on new policies, and review their job descriptions and work expectations. Lastly, it's wise for managers and dedicated educators to instruct the team and take time to validate their skill sets by providing inservices, hands-on training and orientation to other areas of the department.

We should take this opportunity to reset and refocus our attention while we're able. No one knows what will come from this pandemic or how many people will be affected in the coming weeks. Staying focused and moving forward with every opportunity sets leaders apart from managers.

Questions or comments? Email David@ResoluteAdvisoryGroup.com

References

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2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/03/13/coronavirus-numbers-we-really-should-be-worried-about/>

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