Sterile Processing Departments (SPD) have come a long way from five to ten years ago when the biggest problem they faced was sterilizing instruments. While SPD is rarely the culprit for infection in the OR, it is an easy finger point. Why? Because as Vice President of Sullivan Healthcare Consulting Bill Bailey says, “You can’t tout quality unless you have the data to back it up.” Even though instrument tracking is readily available, it is rarely used to its full potential. Hospitals know they need to standardize instrument tracking, and they have the tools they need to carry it out. But if a tracking system is not used effectively, hospitals cannot readily prove that instruments are safe and accounted for.

So, why is instrument tracking a problem? Why aren’t the right instruments available? Why aren’t they ready to be used?

Sullivan has found that hospitals commonly lack proper resources and planning to be successful. Hospitals often need expert guidance to help them do what they know they need to do. There are more demands on SPD than ever before, so the department needs to be set up for success.

Elements that Impact Success:

- **Empowered Governance:** SPD needs to have a leadership structure in place that is empowered to enact and maintain change. A well functioning SPD team might consist of a manager, a full-time educator, a staff member dedicated to instrument tracking, supervisors, and lead technicians.

- **Data:** Technology is a big piece of instrument tracking, and documentation in the OR is paramount. Gathering data takes time, but it gives necessary information on instruments. There is a learning curve with technology. Some staff members do not naturally care about technology and can be non-compliant or override the system. If data is not gathered, the lack of documentation validating proper cleaning processes and sterilization parameters can leave hospitals open to lawsuits. It is important to create a culture of consistent, accountable data capture.

- **Use of Data:** With accurate data, a hospital can realize change that is transformational to an OR. Data driven change ensures standardization of care and consistent use of best practices.

Sullivan Healthcare Consulting: 1.866.303.8968
Sullivan can help assess whether an instrument tracking system is being properly used by answering some simple questions:

- Can you find supplies when you need them?
- Do you have a technological system for instrument tracking?
- Are you using it?
- Are you pulling data from it?
- Are you analyzing the data?
- Is it interfaced with the OR system?
- Is it interfaced with the sterilization system?
- Is data traced to the patient record including date, time, and temperature?

When an instrument tracking system is properly used, supplies are readily available, data is up to date and is useful, time is saved in the OR, and instruments can be easily tracked and accounted for. Bailey summarizes, “You need leadership, and knowledge to know what to do with that data.”

The key to making sure SPD is working smoothly is communication, collaboration, and planning between the OR and SPD. Many hospitals are busy fighting fires in the OR rather than developing systems to gather data, analyze it, and use it. Sullivan consultants can help hospitals optimize technology and provide leadership to help implement proven solutions.

Are your challenges with SPD management causing OR case delays, longer case times, OR staff overtime, and cancelled cases? We can help.

[Best Practice Sterile Processing Program Assessment]

Contact Us to Get Started: 1.866.303.8968