





Leading the SPD Through Standard & Guideline Changes

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss strategies to ensure that standard and guideline changes are understood and implemented into departmental practice
2. Explain the importance of using a step-by-step approach to implementation
3. Discuss the role of team meetings, educational materials, audits and other tools in the successful implementation of updated standards and guidelines

Transitioning from standards and guidelines to real-world practice in Sterile Processing departments (SPDs) can be challenging, especially as new guidance documents are introduced. Just when staff members start to feel comfortable with processes in the department, a new best practice is introduced, which can be challenging. Organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) and the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) provide valuable standards and guidelines; however, it takes a strong Sterile Processing (SP) team and effective leadership to apply those documents and recommendations practically in their operations.

This lesson explores how to lead the SP team through guidance document transitions, using ANSI/AAMI ST91:2021 *Flexible and semi-rigid endoscope processing in health care facilities* and ANSI/AAMI ST108:2023 *Water for*

the processing of medical devices as examples. ST91:2021 emphasizes stricter requirements for the cleaning, inspection and processing of flexible endoscopes and provides recommendations for more stringent cleaning procedures, drying, validation testing of endoscopes for cleanliness, and thorough documentation, among other topics. Understandably, the updates have created urgency within SPDs to ensure compliance. The SP team should determine which areas to focus on and address gaps identified during the planning phase.

ST108:2023 focuses on the critical importance of water quality within the SPD. While steam sterilization has always been emphasized when discussing sterilization processes, the industry now recognizes that water quality requires a more holistic approach because it touches almost every process in device processing areas. Poor water quality—due to impurities, mineral content, or inadequate filtration—can lead to the



formation of residues or biofilm on device surfaces, compromising cleanliness and functionality.

This lesson also provides recommendations and strategies for implementation, team building, and overcoming the hurdles of audits that often arise during guideline and standard transitions, with a focus on collaboration and leadership.

Objective 1: Discuss strategies to ensure that recent standard and guideline changes are understood and implemented into departmental practice

Effective leadership is essential when navigating changes like those introduced by ST91 and ST108. While agencies like AAMI and AORN are not regulatory bodies, their standards and guidelines, respectively, are recognized by accrediting organizations such as The Joint Commission. SP professionals must understand these guidelines and actively drive their implementation.

SP leaders must foster a culture where all team members play a vital role in the transition's success. Transitions can be challenging for technicians because they require a comprehensive understanding of both technical and operational details; therefore, cross-departmental collaboration is critical for engaging the SPD, Operating Room, Facilities and Biomedical teams, each of which provides valuable expertise. Leadership should guide discussions, encourage knowledge sharing, and investigate the rationale behind existing processes, such the placement of pipes and filters in reverse osmosis (RO) water systems. At the same time, SP technicians must remain committed to understanding the new recommendations, asking for guidance whenever concepts and processes are unclear, and recognize their vital role in staying current with

the latest recommendations for the sake of quality and safety. This commitment and understanding from leaders and technicians will help evaluate how new recommendations affect operations, while identifying areas where adjustments must be made to ensure compliance and efficiency.

Objective 2: Explain the importance of using a step-by-step approach to implementation

When transitioning to new guidelines and standards, the first step is to thoroughly investigate current practices. This should begin with having an interdisciplinary team identify gaps and areas for improvement. Using ST108 as an example, it is helpful to ask questions such as who is responsible for changing RO water filters—and how frequently—and whether established policies are in place to address those tasks. Such inquiries can help identify the best starting point. Once an assessment of the current state is completed, it is important to assess whether departmental policies are being followed consistently and a clear plan is in place. This deeper evaluation sets the foundation for meaningful progress that can make a significant difference in the long term.

The team should collaboratively review the updated standards and guidelines to fully understand the new requirements and recommendations and discuss the differences between them. They should focus on what can be achieved immediately with current processes and equipment and explore what might require assistance from vendor partners. For example, ST91 mentions two types of storage cabinets: drying cabinets and conventional cabinets. The team should consider whether to continue using conventional storage cabinets while

ensuring endoscopes are thoroughly dried according to the 10-minute drying recommendation, or if it is the right time to explore pricing for drying cabinets.

It is essential that the team understands that the guidance documents provide resources and best practices, but that the healthcare facility has the autonomy to make decisions that best suit patient care. Take, for example, research that has shown that any residual moisture left inside flexible endoscopes creates an environment where bacteria can grow. Using this information, the team should decide the best course of action, which could be maintaining the current setup or investing in drying cabinets to enhance compliance and patient safety.

Once there is a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved, the team can then partner with vendors as needed. It is vital that the interdisciplinary team has a shared vision, and everyone knows their specific role in the process to effectively move forward with the next steps.

Before jumping into the implementation phase, the team must receive necessary training and education. Cleaning verification testing recommendations in ST91, for example, suggest a test be implemented to ensure a flexible endoscope is clean before performing consecutive tasks. As such, SP technicians will require training on these new testing protocols to ensure they are prepared to execute the process effectively. Technicians can benefit significantly from demonstrations of the full process from beginning to end and then providing return demonstrations to leaders or educators to ensure they understand the steps and can perform the process correctly and consistently.

Objective 3: Discuss the role of team meetings, educational materials, audits and other tools in the successful



implementation of updated standards and guidelines

Thorough documentation is essential for implementing new standards and guidelines. Keeping detailed meeting minutes that outline the agenda, discussions, conclusions and participants ensures transparency and accountability and provides auditors with clear evidence of the team's decision-making and progress toward compliance. The records should be well organized and readily accessible for review.

Maintaining organized and thorough records helps demonstrate the team's commitment to implementing the latest standards and guidelines to improve patient safety. It also helps SP professionals stay on track with goals and timelines.

Sometimes, auditors may arrive and attempt to understand how the department is progressing with new guidelines and standards. SP professionals should keep the following key points in mind to help ensure collaborative conversation occurs during the audits:

- Direct the auditor to documentation for every step, including competencies and training.
- Explain how and why decisions were made and provide the rationale behind the decisions.
- Highlight team or interdisciplinary involvement.
- Align policies with current or updated processes to reflect actual practices.
- Be transparent about progress and demonstrate commitment to compliance.
- Keep the focus on patient safety.

Conclusion

Navigating the transition from standards and guidelines to real-world practices in Sterile Processing can be complex; however, with effective leadership and team involvement, evaluation, training and documentation, the SP team can

implement new and updated guidance documents successfully.

It is crucial that healthcare facilities interpret guidelines and standards and select the approaches that best fit their unique circumstances and operational needs. By fostering an environment of shared responsibility and open communication, SPDs can enhance compliance and improve patient outcomes. 📍

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CRCST Self-Study Lesson Plan Quiz: Leading the SPD Through Standard & Guideline Changes

Lesson No. CRCST 200 (Technical Continuing Education – TCE) · Lesson expires February 2027

1. Transitioning to new and updated standards and guidelines can be challenging for Sterile Processing (SP) technicians because:
 - a. Many documents are written for only high-level executives
 - b. A comprehensive understanding of both technical and operational details is required
 - c. Many technicians are inexperienced and inadequately trained
 - d. The documents are too lengthy for most SP professionals to review given the time constraints in the Sterile Processing department (SPD)
2. What does ANSI/AAMI ST108:2023 primarily address in Sterile Processing departments?
 - a. Proper documentation of procedures
 - b. Cleaning of endoscopes
 - c. Water quality and treatment
 - d. Steam sterilization
3. Which of the following is a key reason for updating SP standards?
 - a. Financial benefits for hospitals
 - b. Technology continues to advance and clinical practices evolve
 - c. Purchasing pressure from vendors
 - d. All the above
4. According to ANSI/AAMI ST91, what is one of the risks of improperly dried flexible endoscopes?
 - a. Biofilm formation and bacterial growth
 - b. Shortened device lifespan
 - c. Reduced image quality
 - d. Damage to the lens and accessories
5. What is the first step in implementing new standards and guidelines?
 - a. Partnering with vendors for education
 - b. Reviewing current processes and identifying gaps
 - c. Conducting a third-party audit
 - d. Asking neighboring facilities how they addressed the changes
6. What question should teams ask when reviewing their current processes for ANSI/AAMI ST108?
 - a. How many endoscopes are used each day?
 - b. Is this the responsibility of the Facilities department?
 - c. Who is responsible for changing reverse osmosis water filters?
 - d. How often are surgical instruments replaced?
7. How should hospitals implement new standards?
 - a. Wait and see if the change is warranted
 - b. Follow all guidelines strictly, without customization
 - c. Interpret guidelines and tailor them to best fit the facility's needs
 - d. Rely solely on auditors for guidance and implementation
8. What does ST91 recommend to verify that flexible endoscopes are clean before their next use?
 - a. Visual inspection only
 - b. Using drying cabinets for 20 minutes
 - c. Doubling the time of the disinfection process
 - d. Implementing a cleanliness verification test
9. During an audit, what should teams emphasize when discussing the implementation of new standards with auditors?
 - a. Cost savings achieved through the new processes
 - b. Documented steps, team involvement, and the focus on patient safety
 - c. Vendor recommendations
 - d. None of the above
10. Which of the following is critical for success when implementing new standards and guidelines?
 - a. Assigning all responsibility to one department
 - b. Encouraging cross-departmental collaboration
 - c. Relying primarily on vendor support for decision-making
 - d. Following suggestions from online chat rooms
11. Who should take the lead on AAMI standard changes?
 - a. Facilities and Engineering
 - b. Surgery
 - c. Facility Administration
 - d. Sterile Processing
12. Why are surveyors interested in the documentation of changes?
 - a. It demonstrates a plan and progress toward change
 - b. It enables them to review past records
 - c. It helps them check to ensure the standard is correct
 - d. It identifies the person in charge of the change
13. Once an assessment of the current state is completed:
 - a. New equipment should be purchased
 - b. Compliance with guidance documents will be achieved
 - c. It is important to assess whether departmental policies are being followed consistently
 - d. The C-suite should be notified
14. When processes are changed:
 - a. Education for the new process should take place before it is implemented
 - b. Notice should be sent to the facility's survey organization
 - c. Approval must be granted by Surgery
 - d. Implementation should take place at the beginning of the month
15. It is essential that all SP professionals:
 - a. Perform informal audits of changed processes at least monthly
 - b. Play a vital role in the department's success when transitioning to new standards and guidelines
 - c. Delay the adoption of new practices if resources are limited
 - d. Take the lead on processing changes

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