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CLINICAL ROUNDS: Tracking down wayward sponge

Nursing2006

October 2006

Volume 36 Number 10

Pages 35 - 35



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Tracking down wayward sponge

[CLINICAL ROUNDS: NEWS, UPDATES, RESEARCH: RADIOFREQUENCY TECHNOLOGY]



Figure. No caption available.

Surgical gauze sponges containing penny-sized radiofrequency ID (RFID) chips are less likely to be mistakenly left inside patients, according to a small study involving eight patients undergoing elective pelvic or abdominal surgery. During each surgery, a surgeon placed one sterile surgical RFID sponge in a surgical wound and pulled the wound edges together so the sponge wasn't visible. A second surgeon, who'd looked away during sponge placement, then used a handheld wand to find the RFID sponge. The wand detected all sponges correctly in less than 3 seconds on average. The researchers hailed the results as an engineering success, but cautioned that "the possibility of human error and retained sponges remains because handheld scanning can be performed incorrectly."

An estimated 1,500 objects are left in patients during operations in the United States each year. Two-thirds of these materials are sponges.

Two of this study's authors work for ClearCount Medical Solutions, which is developing the SmartSponge System. For more information, visit <http://www.clearcount.com>.

Source: Initial clinical evaluation of a handheld device for detecting retained surgical gauze sponges using radiofrequency identification technology, Archives of Surgery, A Macario, et al., July 2006.

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