

The emergence of diseases such as variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) is casting doubt on existing methods of decontaminating invasive instruments. Growing health and environmental concerns surrounding the use of aldehyde-based disinfectants have already caused many hospitals to seek alternative means for decontaminating endoscopes and other instruments – particularly those unable to withstand steam sterilisation and autoclaving procedures.

One alternative gaining recognition in hospitals is the use of Tristel liquid sterilants. Based on a patented chlorine dioxide technology, Tristel sterilants are now the method of choice in more than half of the country's NHS and private hospitals.

For the ear, nose and throat (ENT) department at St John's Hospital, Chelmsford, the crunch came 18 months ago when its automated endoscope reprocessor required replacement. Initially the hospital switched to using sheaths to cover its nasal endoscope – using a

new sheath for each procedure. Although preferable to the use of glutaraldehyde, it came at a cost of £10 a sheath and, with over 50 procedures being carried out each week, proved to be very expensive.

So, with Tristel sterilants for washer-disinfectors already in use elsewhere in the trust, the ENT department had no qualms about making a further switch to the use of Tristel Sporidical Wipes when they became available in December 2003.

The wipes, which incorporate Tristel's patented chlorine dioxide chemistry, are suitable for use on all hard surfaces and are ideal for the decontamination of heat-sensitive, non-lumened medical instruments such as nasal endoscopes. Once activated by the application of foam from a controlled dosage dispenser, Tristel says that each wipe will kill all organisms on a pre-cleaned surface with a contact time of 30 seconds.

Clearing the mist

The wipes are now routinely used at St John's Hospital and, once existing stocks of sheaths have been

exhausted, they will also be used at neighbouring St Peter's Hospital. ENT outpatient manager Sister Eve Ray said: "When I first started in ENT at St John's five years ago, we were using glutaraldehyde in a great fume cupboard which took up half the room. We only had one scope and it had to be left in the glutaraldehyde for 20 minutes. The investigative procedure only takes 10 minutes, so the cleaning of the scope was the limiting step. We had to buy another scope to avoid delays. Using the sheaths was fine but expensive."

In addition, St Peter's no longer needs a fume cupboard and is relieved of the health hazards associated with the use of glutaraldehyde – and the extra expense associated with sheath use.

A quick rinse

Tristel recently also introduced Pre-Clean Wipes and Rinse Wipes – with each wipe supplied in an individual sachet. When combined with the Tristel/HealthEdge quality audit trail, the company says that it provides a complete decontamination system. Pre-Clean Wipes, intended for use in the first 'pre-cleaning' step of the decontamination process, are impregnated with a low-foaming surfactant system combined with triple enzymes to produce an ultra-low surface tension for rapid and thorough cleaning prior to high-level disinfection and sterilisation. The Rinse Wipes are impregnated with de-ionised water and a low-level antioxidant to remove and neutralise any chemical residues remaining after use of the Tristel Sporidical Wipe.

Tristel says that its traceability system provides users with an easy-to-follow method of documentation to ensure the traceability of every wipe's use. The wipes carry a set of traceability labels that users can peel off and affix to patient notes and to the quality audit trail record book. As well as providing evidence that indicates the correct activation and use of every wipe, the record book prompts users to specify details of the instrument being decontaminated, the pre-cleaning and rinsing procedures, and the instrument's next destination.

Back at St Peter's, Ray said that using the wipes has helped improve efficiency: "The wipes are quick and easy to use and we were given appropriate training by Tristel. Decontamination of the scopes is no longer a rate-limiting step and the sporidical action of the wipes is also very reassuring."

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Tristel Sporidical Wipes

