



# CSSD or localised benchtop sterilization

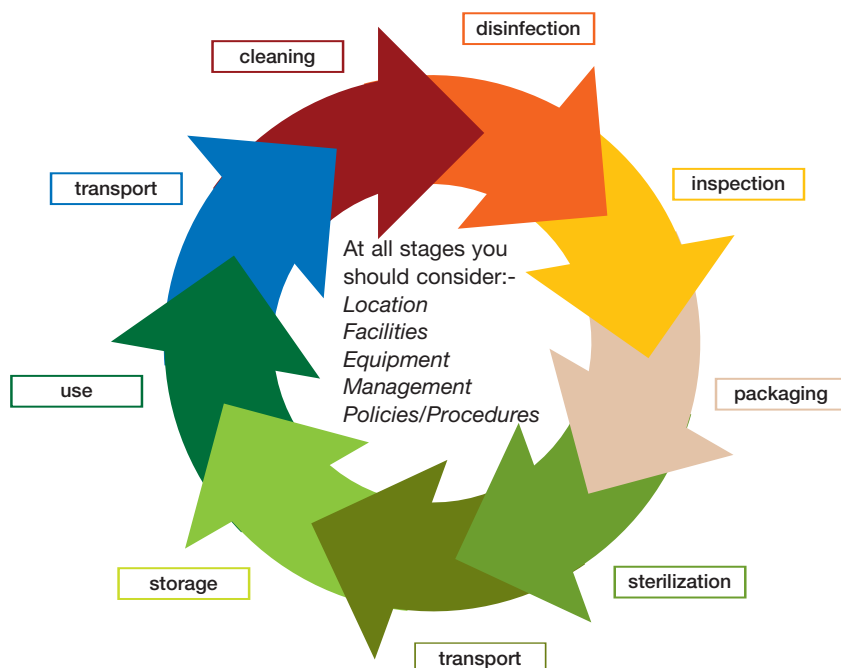
questions to ask, issues to consider

## CSSD - an effective means of instrument sterilization?

Many doctors' surgeries and departments within hospitals depend heavily on Central Sterilization Service Departments (CSSD) to sterilize their surgical instruments. But the advantages of employing an outside service are diminishing as modern, fast, benchtop autoclaves provide 'on the spot' solutions to sterilization requirements. Following the Department of Health's first ever comprehensive national survey of decontamination services within 249 NHS hospitals, NHS Estates reported that 109 hospitals failed to meet acceptable standards in decontamination. Determined to raise standards the NHS announced

£220million would be spent improving the decontamination services, but for the surgery or small practitioner does the use of localised benchtop autoclaves provide a more economical alternative to the investment in CSSD sterilization? When determining which route to take it is important to have a full understanding of the differences between Central Sterilization Service Departments (CSSD) and Localised Benchtop.

A typical decontamination cycle is shown below: -





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Important issues to consider are:

- Does the CSSD have spare capacity and what's the turn around time? CSSDs are excellent if they have the capacity to process varying quantities of your equipment at the time when you need it most. However they can be unsatisfactory if they have a backlog of instruments to process and you need your equipment back within a matter of hours, not days. Patients and clients can't wait.
- Check the CSSD operational hours, delivery and collection frequency and how many pieces they can sterilise in a day, before taking out a contract with them.
- Consider the distance between the CSSD and the surgery, the service is dependant on transport conditions and what happens if the CSSDs' delivery vehicle breaks down or more commonly gets stuck in traffic? Patients and clients won't wait for the delivery to turn up before they can have their treatment.
- What are the hidden costs of using a CSSD? Additional sets of instruments. To overcome any time delays to treatment caused by capacity or delivery problems a local surgery who may be considering switching to a CSSD will probably have to invest heavily in multiple sets of instruments to ensure an even flow of patient consultations, whilst instruments are off-site being sterilized. Regardless of whether instruments are sent away for treatment, a suitable emergency autoclave will be required to handle unplanned and emergency situations.
- Emergency equipment will still require maintenance and testing in accordance with directives.
- Instruments do not belong to the CSSD that are decontaminating. This could lead to loss, or lack of attention and care in handling.
- If treatment is delayed because instruments aren't ready then patients receive an unsatisfactory service, which in an emergency situation could be very dangerous and could lead to a compensation claim. By having a benchtop autoclave on the premises you can have a steady supply of sterile instruments whenever you need them with a waiting time from as little as 8 minutes.
- All medical equipment is costly to purchase and any practice thinking of using a CSSD should consider the affect on their quality of service, and the cost implications of the extra equipment against the cost of purchasing benchtop autoclave for general use. With reliability levels of autoclaves increasing and costs of acquiring and maintaining a machine becoming even more affordable, the real cost of using a benchtop autoclave has decreased

Clearly the benefits of localised benchtop autoclaves are convincing. Costs, convenience and time savings are important to many practices, but there are other issues often overlooked. For example many practitioners and heads of departments may think that autoclaves are difficult to operate and require expensive regular maintenance. This is not the case as autoclaves, including today's vacuum models, are simple to use. Help is also at hand from the leading manufacturers towards training. Today's after-sales service and care packages offer an unbeatable, cost effective service making localised benchtop sterilization accessible for all healthcare professionals whatever their practice or department size.

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