

TOGETHER EVERYONE AVOIDING MISTAKES

Anaesthetists

Circulating staff

Operating department
practitioners

Recovery staff

Scrub staff

Surgeons

The Problem

Every year patients and staff are injured needlessly during electrosurgical (surgical diathermy) procedures. These injuries are often due to user error and poor systems of work and not to the equipment itself. Everyone in the electrosurgery team should understand the risks and take action to avoid injuries.

Safeguarding Public Health

To find out more about the MHRA and the electrosurgery equipment centre log onto www.mhra.gov.uk

Adverse Incident Centre

Hotline: 020 7084 3080

Email: aic@mhra.gsi.gov.uk

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THE ELECTROSURGERY TEAM

Everyone in the team should:

Understand:

- The different types of electrosurgery equipment available
- The risks of electrosurgery and how to minimise them
- The principles of electrosurgical safety
- The importance of selecting appropriate skin preparation solutions (avoid alcohol based preparations as per MDA SN2000(17))
- Why to be careful when using two electrosurgery systems, laser or ultra sonic systems concurrently
- Why insulated quivers are used to store the active electrode when not in use

Consider:

- The patient's age, weight and fat distribution
- The position of the return electrode in relation to the patient's position, the operating site, scars, metal implants or foreign bodies
- Active implants such as pacemakers which may need to be checked by a cardiology team pre/post operation
- Consent to shaving
- Allergy to return electrode gel

Know how to:

- Check the electrosurgery machine and its accessories prior to use
- Prepare the patient properly
- Avoid risks to other theatre staff
- Rectify simple problems
- Check the return electrode site after plate removal

Be aware of:

- Whether the electrosurgery machine is in good order and if it and its accessories have been maintained properly
- The lowest power setting that can be used for safe and effective cutting and coagulation
- The lack of absolute power settings on different devices
- The potential for injury due to capacitive coupling in laparoscopic surgery
- The correct accessories for the machine and their mode of use
- Recommendations for the use of smoke evacuation. Visit www.mhra.gov.uk and go to 'Publications/posters and leaflets' for more information
- How to report adverse incidents and near misses to MHRA and the Trust Medical Device Liaison Officer
- The dangers of activating the electrosurgical device inadvertently or whilst other staff are in direct physical contact with the patient
- Any factor that may affect the use of electrosurgery, eg, presence of a pacemaker



Remember ... you are professionally responsible for your own actions

Safe working needs TEAM working

For information about the MHRA's Electrosurgery educational package visit www.mhra.gov.uk/ConferencesLearningCentre/LearningCentre/Electrosurgery/index.htm

