

GE Healthcare

Anti-microbial Position

Our Policy

We promote the use of single-patient use disposable BP cuffs to combat cross-contamination. We provide cleaning and disinfection procedures inside each box of Critikon® Blood Pressure Cuffs in the event of reuse of our blood pressure cuffs and accessories.

GE Healthcare has avoided the use of antimicrobial materials and surface treatments based on strongly stated opinions of infection control managers and healthcare workers who feel that the unnecessary overuse of antimicrobials is instrumental in the promotion of resistant microbial strains.

"Hospitals provide a fertile environment for drug-resistant pathogens. Patients at increased risk for development of infections,...a high density of very sick people and extensive use of antimicrobials are circumstances associated with resistance. It is under appreciated that all major groups of microorganisms – viruses, fungi, and parasites as well as bacteria – become resistant to antimicrobials."

Anthony S. Fauci, M.D.
Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
February 23, 1999

Comments on Antimicrobial Use and Blood Pressure Cuffs

Antimicrobial agents were developed to combat the spread and severity of many infections. The use of these agents forces microbes to either adapt or die. Those that survive carry genes for resistance to the antimicrobial agent. Microbes are bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses that are responsible for infectious diseases.

The widespread use of antimicrobials for disease control has been paralleled by an increase in resistance in those same bacteria. Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria that cause infection are not killed by the antimicrobials taken to stop the infection. The bacteria survive and continue to multiply, causing more harm. Bacteria are efficient at enhancing the effects of resistance because of their ability to multiply very quickly and because they can transfer their resistant genes to other strains. In addition, resistant microbes can spread easily from person to person. Therefore in hospitals where there is an intensive use of

antimicrobials, and many sick and susceptible people gather together, the spread of resistant bacteria is common.

Resistance may not be detected until a course of treatment fails to cure a patient's infection and may be too late. Infections caused by resistant microbes fail to respond to treatment, result in prolonged illness, and greater risk of death. Treating antimicrobial-resistant infections often requires the use of more expensive or more toxic drugs and can result in longer hospital stays. Treatment failures lead to longer periods of infectivity, which increases the numbers of infected people moving in the community, increasing the opportunities for spread of resistance and exposing the general population to risk of contracting infections with resistant strains. Prolonged illness increases the costs of treatment for additional laboratory tests, treatment, hospitalization, and the indirect costs of loss of income and time away from family. When infections become resistant to first line antimicrobials, treatment has to be switched to second line agents which are almost always more costly. The total cost of treating antimicrobial-resistant infections may be as high as \$5 billion annually in the U.S. alone.

Antimicrobial resistance is not a disease that can be eradicated. It is a natural response of microbes to exposure to antimicrobial agents. Widespread use of antimicrobials promotes the spread of antimicrobial resistance. Much needs to be done to reduce the overuse, and inappropriate use, of antimicrobials agents. Smart use of antimicrobials is the key to decreasing the spread of resistance.

No other piece of medical equipment is in more constant use without adequate disinfection than blood pressure cuffs. Blood Pressure Cuffs are a recognized source of transmission, allowing direct transfer of infection from patient to cuff to other patients and staff. In fact, the patient contact side of the blood pressure cuff is 2 times more likely to be a carrier of infection than the outside of the cuff. This occurs on reusable perceived "clean" cuffs and re-used disposable cuffs.